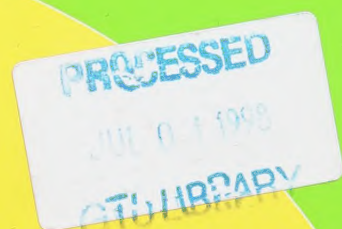


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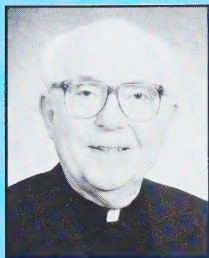
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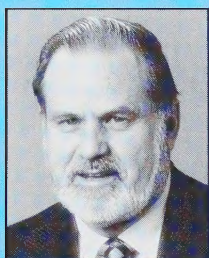




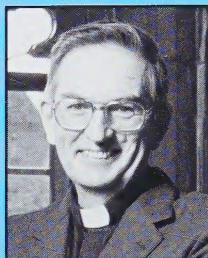
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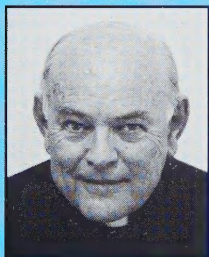
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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CONTENTS

5

IS RELIGIOUS LIFE DYING?

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.

15

THE PASSION OF ANGER

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

21

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

26

THE THIRD AGE (AN ALTERNATING CURRENT)

James Torrens, S.J.

28

STRESS IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

34

THE PSYCHOPATHIC MINISTER

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

38

THE PRESUMPTION OF PRIESTLY PERMANENCE

George Aschenbrenner, S.J.

45

THERAPY FOR LEADERS

Quinn R. Connors, O.Carm., Ph.D., and Robert W. Lappin, Ph.D.

2

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3

EDITOR'S PAGE

Learning to Live Like the Best

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EDITOR'S PAGE

LEARNING TO LIVE LIKE THE BEST

The new president of the 155,000-member American Psychological Association, Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman, wants to transform the profession of psychology. Observing that too many psychologists, especially researchers, have been focusing their interest and efforts on pathology (as medical scientists do), he complains that the thrust of psychology has been negative for the past one hundred years. What is needed now, he told the *New York Times* recently, is a shift to a "positive scientific approach" that will emphasize human strengths and virtues, not just ways of coping with distress and compensating for traumatic experiences.

Dr. Seligman proposes that psychologists undertake in-depth studies of what he regards as the central aspects of human life: love, work, and play. He also encourages his colleagues to review and synthesize what has been learned in the past about these issues, so that people can make use of those findings in order to live better and happier lives. For the accomplishment of his plan, Seligman points out three urgent requirements: the involvement of the brightest young minds in the field of psychology, financing for research, and leadership. His hope is to obtain grant money from the National Institute of Mental Health, which, he says, realizes that "the disease model does not offer sufficient insights into prevention" of psychiatric and other illnesses.

The idea of studying scientifically the components of a normal, healthy, and happy life is certainly not new. Nearly half a century ago, Dr. Abraham H. Maslow, the eminent psychologist and researcher at Brandeis University, led his colleagues in an extensive study of human nature and behavior, and created what he called a "positive" and "humanistic" theory and clinical practice. Maslow's efforts were aimed principally at discerning those attributes of people's

lives that contribute most to their achieving and maintaining true well-being. His method was to observe and learn from the lives of the best available examples of full human development. As Maslow explained in *The Farthest Reaches of Human Nature*, "If we want to answer the question how tall can the human species grow, then obviously it is well to pick out the ones who are already tallest and study them." Similarly, he noted that "if we want to know the possibilities for spiritual growth, value growth or moral development in human beings, then I maintain that we can learn the most by studying our most moral, ethical or saintly people." He recognized that a thorough investigation of the lives of these best individuals "would entail enough research projects to keep squadrons of scientists busy for the next century." Whether Seligman realizes it or not, he and his colleagues are committing themselves to a venture that fits in well with Maslow's lifelong studies, and they are serving as one of the "squadrons" that he foresaw.

A lesson we can learn from Maslow's research is what it takes to motivate people—especially the young—to strive to become fully mature and alive human beings. In his extensive cross-cultural and cross-generational studies, Maslow found that two things are necessary: one of these is a man or woman close at hand who exemplifies the kinds of qualities and behaviors characteristic of a "complete" person; the second is an invitation—someone saying, in effect, "You can become like that if you really want to and are willing to invest the effort required."

Undoubtedly, it will take decades for Seligman's proposed studies on work, love, and play to be initiated and completed. But in the meantime, those of us trying to help young people to develop their human capabilities don't have to wait for the publication of his research findings. Like Maslow, with a little initiative, we can seek out and learn from those women and men who appear most effective at living their lives, performing their work, using leisure well,

keeping physically and mentally healthy, and deepening their relationships with God, family, community, and friends. It doesn't take participation in a formal research project for us to ask outstanding people to tell us who has provided inspiration, example, and mentoring for them, and what have been their own goals, values, and significant growth experiences along their pathway to a rich and full maturity. In other words, we can easily inquire about the sources of their becoming the highly developed persons they are. (I've never met one such individual who replied anything like, "I haven't the slightest idea.") Learning from these best of people will suggest the direction for our own future development and cast light on the route to fullness of life for the young people whom God places in our care.

Consequently, I don't know any better way to attract the young to the rewarding and beautiful life of

work, love, and play possible for them within the context of priesthood or religious life than to put them in touch with priests, sisters, or brothers who are fully alive, effective, and experiencing deep enjoyment in their careers. Let them ask these adults what has made them so successful in finding joy and fulfillment in their lives. The same sort of strategy can be helpful in guiding those whom God is calling to married life or to such careers as teaching, nursing, composing music, or acting on the stage. Wholeness and happiness are waiting for everyone; example and invitation, followed by striving, can provide the way.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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Is Religious Life Dying?

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.

During the year prior to his death, Jesuit Anthony de Mello spoke about the power of illusions. They shape our behavior, he noted, and influence the ways in which we think. De Mello illustrated his point with a simple example: During an airplane flight from New York to Toronto, the pilot made an announcement. "Look out the windows on the left," he said. "You will see the border of the United States." De Mello, a passenger on that flight, realized immediately that the pilot was mistaken. After all, you cannot see the border between the United States and Canada. It is an illusion—a creation of our imagination.

Illusions, though, help determine decisions that we make. Wars have been fought, for example, over the location of the border of the United States, and laws continue to bar some people from crossing that imaginary line. We have set up customs stations, employed border patrols, erected fences—all to safeguard something that exists only in our minds.

Today some U.S. Catholics have come to believe that apostolic religious life is dead in this country—or, at the very least, suffering through its final days. As if to add support to the idea that religious life in the United States is near its end, a number of congregational leaders report that a significant proportion of their time is taken up with issues of

diminution: aging membership, retirement, nursing care, the closing of long-standing institutions.

In its many expressions, the belief that religious life is on life support has had serious consequences, causing us to take certain actions and avoid others. Judging these to be its last days, for example, many Catholics hesitate to invite young men and women to consider religious life as a vocation. Others ask, Why join a religious congregation during the "age of the laity"? One need not be a religious, they point out, to take up a ministry in the church today.

Accepting the notion that religious life in the United States is dying, a number of priests, sisters, and brothers have failed to address adequately three tasks necessary to ensure that their way of living the gospel remains vital in the U.S. church: clarifying its identity, promoting vocations, and fostering genuine partnership in spirituality and ministry with laypeople. If their lack of action continues in these areas, we can reasonably expect to witness the death of religious life in the United States.

Suppose for a moment, though, that the belief that U.S. religious life is dying is merely an illusion, just like the U.S. border. What would happen to our ways of thinking and behaving if we were to accept as valid the premise that religious life in this country is on the brink of rebirth. How would we feel

and act? What message would we give to young people?

ARE RELIGIOUS INVISIBLE?

Identity differentiates us one from another. Sexual identity, for example, allows us to make the distinction between men and women. In the past, the identity of U.S. religious was clear, at least to Roman Catholics. Forty years ago, if you mentioned to any Catholic schoolchild the term "sister," you got a look of instant recognition. Young people might not have known about religious life in all its details, but they were able to identify those who were its members. Men and women religious were people set apart. Having pledged themselves to live the gospel message more intensely, they had also given up certain things that most people could expect to have: a spouse, money and some control over it, the right to make their own decisions.

Today, however, we find a different reality. The majority of contemporary religious are invisible. Many wear no distinctive garb. Convents and parish residences that once housed large numbers of priests, sisters, and brothers have been abandoned in favor of private homes or apartments housing small groups or individuals. The number of religious is also greatly reduced in institutions their congregations once owned and administered; somewhere along the road of renewal, several groups apparently gave up altogether the idea of a corporate witness in ministry. The identity of religious life, once clear and clearly understood, is today fuzzy at best, and downright confusing to some.

These changes are cited in any discussion about the death of religious life in the United States. Some religious advocate a return to many practices of the past. They argue that most contemporary sisters, priests, and brothers have gone well beyond what the Vatican II Council fathers had in mind when they first encouraged renewal, essentially transforming their congregations into secular institutes. Yes, religious life in the United States is dying, this group observes—and is there any wonder why?

In hindsight, the practice of religious life during the first part of this century may look a bit quaint. In its heyday, however, its tenets were clear to anyone who took time to think about this way of living. Obviously, though, the theology of religious life needed to mature. One of the refreshing outcomes of the renewal efforts of the past forty years has been the growing realization that it is beneficial to have more than one theology of religious life.

A great deal of good has come from the experimentation of the past four decades. There have, how-

ever, also been a number of false starts. Looking back over their recent history of risk-taking and hard work, and wanting to ensure the future vitality of their way of life, U.S. religious need to ask this question today: In our efforts of the past forty years, what has been of the Spirit and what has not?

PRESENT-DAY CHALLENGES

Suppose that we accept the premise that religious life in the United States is on the verge of rebirth. What action must men and women religious take in response? Surely, we should not set out on a journey that has the past as its destination. Sisters, priests, and brothers, though, do need to work quickly toward a clear identity for their way of life, even if it is provisional. Simply put, after more than forty years of searching, the time has come for sober reassessment.

Religious life's identity needs to mark it as different from other equally valid ways of living out the message of Jesus. For at least four decades, brothers, sisters, and priests have worked hard to assure fellow church members that the life of a religious is no better than any other approach to living the gospel. At times, unfortunately, in their efforts to ensure egalitarianism, they have failed to emphasize those characteristics that make religious life unique—not better, but definitely different. Lacking such elements, religious life is not worth embracing. Contemporary young people expect that to be true; so do their elders in religious life. To settle on some features that characterize a distinct and fresh identity for U.S. religious life would not cut off the possibility of change in the future. It would, however, ensure that contemporary men and women religious stand for something.

Forming an identity is always a tricky business. On a personal level, we are all called to form a provisional identity during our adolescent and young adult years. We refashion that identity whenever we go through times of life change and transition. Surely, I am a different person at age 50 from the insecure young man who stepped onto the world's stage at 22. At that age, most of us probably felt as though we were impersonating an adult; thirty years later, we feel all too adult indeed.

Men and women approach the task of identity formation from different perspectives. Boundaries help men in their self-definition; for women, relationships take on greater importance. Men often bond around some task. Women, in contrast, value their friendships with other women because they provide them with opportunities to share their inner world of meaning. These different approaches to identity formation influence the ways in which men and women

address the same tasks in the life of their congregations. Each gender has something to learn from the other.

The work of identity formation for contemporary religious life in the United States will not be furthered by retreating to models that promoted vibrancy in another time. Although that response to change can be seductive during any time of transition, choosing it will only lead to a loss of vitality and ultimately betray any possible future. In the hard work of identity formation today, we need to draw on the experience of both individuals and the group over the past four decades.

STEPS TO IDENTITY FORMATION

What does it take for a group to develop a clear identity? First of all, its members must take a hard look at the options available to them as a group. This task has been addressed seriously by most U.S. congregations, even before the years of Vatican Council II. In the light of their charisms and in response to the calls of the church, changing realities, and new needs, men and women religious have asked, What ways of being in the world will foster a radical dependence on God and further the mission of Jesus?

The second step in the process of identity formation includes dealing with the inevitable crises that follow upon any process of exploration. Over the past four decades, men and women religious have learned quickly two hard lessons: exploration leads to crises, and the more possibilities for living that you uncover, the greater your crises.

The third step in the process of identity formation involves commitment. To bring any period of transition, change, and experimentation to fruition, we must make some choices. After assessing many competing and possibly equally compelling possibilities, we must decide where we stand, what points of view we hold, and how we plan to live our life.

If U.S. priests, sisters, and brothers want to forge a new identity for their way of life, they cannot escape the process of assessment and choice. Although there is a broad spectrum of ways to express religious life, it must incorporate certain essential components and boundaries. In recent years, some men and women religious in the United States have failed to make the choices necessary to ensure that their identity is clear to them and everyone else. If this situation continues, the point of religious life will be unclear.

Some congregations' current definitions of membership are so broad and all-inclusive that they have better application as a definition of the church at large. A small number of groups have "widened the tent" to the extent that any work chosen by their

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members qualifies as ministry. In so doing, they have rendered almost meaningless the notion of a common mission for the congregation. Consequently, young people considering their life choices are likely to view a lifetime commitment to religious life as foolhardy.

ESSENTIALS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

A simple principle lies at the heart of religious life: its members strive to be radically dependent on God and to serve others for the sake of the Kingdom. In making the choice to live in this way, sisters, priests, and brothers become deeply committed to their congregations. By allowing their fellow religious and the group as a whole a claim over them, they give witness to the high costs of membership and ministry.

Radical gospel living has always marked genuine religious life. In the light of this notion, we can reasonably expect to see three important elements in the emerging new identity of U.S. religious life: a renewed sense of prayer, a new understanding of obedience and community, and a clear mission.

RENEWED SENSE OF PRAYER

The real crises in contemporary U.S. religious life are not related to vocations; they concern spirituality and significance. Unless our way of living the gospel has at its heart Jesus Christ and a regular life of personal and communal prayer, it eventually makes little sense to its members or, for that matter, anyone else.

Monastic spirituality and its practice are well-developed within our Catholic tradition; apostolic spirituality much less so. Brothers, sisters, and priests in apostolic congregations today face a dilemma: how to fashion a spirituality that is genuinely apostolic and draws also on the charismatic traditions of their groups. Some congregations, for example, were founded during the past century around the cult of Mary, who thus has a central place in their spirituality. A nineteenth-century image of Mary, however, serves little use today in helping those same groups develop a spirituality that expresses their religious identity and spiritual longings. They need to develop an understanding of Mary more in keeping with changed circumstances.

The uniqueness of charism cannot be underestimated when attempting to rework a congregation's spirituality. The Second Vatican Council called on men and women religious to capture the heart of their founding charisms but to dispense with the clutter of historical trappings surrounding them.

What does this challenge mean when we consider the charisms given to our church through Francis and Clare, Mary Ward, Marcellin Champagnat, Dominic, Catherine McAuley? And what does it mean specifically within the context of U.S. culture? These men and women, in founding their congregations, must have sensed that the gospel was never meant to make us feel warm and cozy; it was meant to break our hearts. Can we let Jesus, the Word of God, seize us as he did the men and women who, against all reasonable odds, launched the congregations that exist today? A renewed religious life must have at its core a variety of vibrant and charismatic spiritualities.

Those who come to religious life seem to have been born with a particular charism alive within them. In time, they find a congregation that embodies that same spirit—whether the Jesuits or the Christian Brothers, the Sisters of Charity or the Daughters of Saint Paul. Today an increasing number of laypeople count themselves among those who have known their charism from the beginning.

Priests, sisters, and brothers in the United States today face a unique challenge: to fashion a spirituality and a practice of that spirituality that are in keeping with the nature of their life and the spiritual heritage that informs it. After all, who wants to be a generic religious? Plurality can manifest itself in contemporary religious communities through the unique spirituality found in each congregation. Considerable work lies ahead in this area, and the starting point for addressing it does not lie in adopting uncritically a spirituality more suited to the monastery. Genuine partnership with laypeople will

never be a reality unless religious congregations have something profoundly spiritual to offer to the wider church.

NEW UNDERSTANDING OF OBEDIENCE

Religious life has, in general, been centered more often on the group and its goals rather than on the individual. The prospect of achieving some level of personal development is usually not what draws people to join a congregation of sisters, priests, or brothers. That outcome can be a byproduct of living well the religious life but not the reason for its existence.

One of the challenges religious must address today is what claim their group can realistically have over them. Inevitable tensions exist between the group's needs and those of the individual. We must rediscover and develop an obedience we can love and want to practice, though it may make demands on us that appear too idealistic or even unrealistic.

Several different understandings of obedience exist in U.S. religious life today. Some religious observe a strict concept of obedience. Their congregation's entire rule is judged to be the expression of God's will for each day. The least desire of the local leader is seen as an expression of that same will. Others describe obedience as a minor virtue. They find it no more demanding than the obedience of a person in a normally successful professional life or a reasonably happy marriage. For still others, obedience is no longer considered a virtue; these men and women have lost faith in it and abandoned its practice.

A growing number of U.S. religious, however, find these views of obedience overly simplistic and vague. They believe that virtue should make demands and want to seek in a radical way God's dream for them and their lives.

Discerning the dream of God is not an easy task. Those who choose discernment prefer to live out their obedience in terms of mediation. They have a willingness to ask these difficult questions: What claim does the group have over me and my time, talents, and choices? Can I believe that the group is capable of mediating God's dream for me? To avoid these issues reduces the congregation to little more than an association of generous and thoughtful people. It eventually becomes innocuous.

Leadership and the exercise of authority are important elements in any new understanding of the practice of obedience. During the initial phases of renewal, the issue of authority in religious congregations was difficult to address within the context of U.S. society. Democratic processes have, quite rightly, challenged former notions about the exercise of authority among religious. Also, we have

come to realize that views about the proper role and exercise of authority vary from group to group. These developments are positive and bode well for the future.

Any government or system of authority in which the organization stands out more conspicuously than the evidence of love is a betrayal of the gospel. Prophetic leaders have a clear vision about the future; they are able to gain the group's cooperation on decisions made and foster its overall direction. They help members see what they can achieve together if the group's potential is realized. In the final analysis, to practice the virtue of obedience well, U.S. religious need to do but two things: to take God's dream for them seriously and to be impassioned seekers after that dream. Leaders and their congregations need to be busy at the same tasks. All must be faithful.

CLARITY OF MISSION

Apostolic congregations came into being to meet concrete needs—whether to care for the indigent, educate and evangelize the sons and daughters of immigrants, or shelter the homeless. A mission was at the heart of the founding moment of each congregation. The Marists, or Society of Mary, for example, came into being during the post-revolutionary era in France. Although the group later grew into four branches, its founding members dedicated themselves to reevangelizing a population that had lost faith because of the excesses of war.

Mary was at the heart of this movement. The Marists' image of her, like that developed by a number of their contemporaries, was a new one. Rather than standing alone, Mary was seen in the context of relationships: to Jesus, to the church, to the contemporary world. The mercy and compassion of God were the movement's hallmarks. Members pledged themselves to do the work of Mary.

Within these broad outlines, two elements were clear: Marists were meant to make the church visible in places where it was not, and they would move on once their work was complete. Early Marists would have been surprised had they returned a century and a half later and seen their heirs celebrating one hundred years of ministry in the same place.

CORPORATE COMMITMENTS NEEDED

All members of the church share in the mission of Jesus. A religious congregation's ministry, an expression of that mission, is a critical element in its identity. In our attempts to fashion a new model of U.S. religious life for the next century, we must admit that

the area of ministry has been a challenging one. Valuable aspects of identity, for example, were lost when a number of priests, sisters, and brothers surrendered corporate witness for a variety of effective but individual ministries. Corporate commitments, though they may be short-term, make a statement that individual involvements do not.

As an increasing number of groups have opted for individual ministries, some members—even though they may be doing a necessary work of the church—have strayed from the mission that was central to their congregation's foundation. Eventually, the sense of being sent by the group is lost as more and more members become concerned with simply procuring a position.

New models of religious life may well be emerging in the United States where elements other than life together and a common ministry bind a group of people and help them make sense of their commitment to the gospel. Congregations, however, must continue to make room for—and support actively—those who wish to pursue together a common and corporate ministry as they work to breathe new life into an original founding inspiration.

In addressing this important area of ministry, religious need not retreat to models more suitable for the past. Nor should they respond solely to the ministry needs of the local church, as pressing as those might seem. Religious can live out the founding vision of their congregation in fresh and creative ways. To do this, some questions must be asked. First, what are the essential components of the group's founding ministry—to evangelize the young, especially the poor; to provide health care in a spirit of mercy; to spread the gospel message using communication media? Each group must work to reach consensus on the elements that define its mission.

Next, to what absolute human need was the group responding at the time of its foundation, and how is that need present in our world today? Religious have typically gone to places where they could work with people whom society had cast aside. We have adequate educational and health care facilities in many parts of the United States today because men and women religious first provided both when the larger society would not.

The group also needs to ask what target group was identified for the congregation's services at its beginning: children and women at risk, the elderly, those in need of catechizing, the homeless, those denied adequate medical care? Where is this group to be found in today's society? Finally, the congregation must determine realistically what human and financial resources it needs in order to meet this need in its new form.

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MISSIONS ADAPTED TO NEW NEEDS

One group of contemporary women religious in the southeastern United States administered an elementary school. Among their pupils were a large number of children of migrant workers. Many of these students spent but a few weeks at the school before moving on with their families to follow the harvest.

Three of the religious who served at the school decided to follow up on these children to determine the consequences of the frequent moves to which they were subjected. They discovered that a significant percentage of the students dropped out of school entirely after three or four moves. This was not surprising: What elementary-school child can sustain four or five "new beginnings" each academic year?

The solution these women religious devised for this problem shows that a congregation's foundational mission can adapt to new needs. With the blessing of their province leadership team, they bought three mobile homes, used them to set up a school and a community, and moved with the migrant children. With what results? Among others, a significantly lower dropout rate at the end of one year.

Similar examples abound of creative and fresh applications of a congregation's foundational ministry vision to contemporary needs. One is the recent joint effort of several congregations of men and women religious to establish a school in inner-city Baltimore to serve at-risk minority students. By pooling their resources, initiating a development effort at the

outset, and staffing the school with a significant number of sisters and brothers, they minimized costs, putting the price of Catholic education within the reach of the economically poor. More important, the children attending the school now have access to services that the state and other organizations had failed to provide.

APOSTLES, NOT PROFESSIONALS

Institutions continue to be powerful vehicles for change and evangelization in any society. In hospitals, schools, shelters, and legal centers, people working together, united in a common effort, create impacts more significant than those of most individual initiatives. U.S. Catholic schools are a prime example. Whether located in inner-city neighborhoods or suburban developments, however, these schools need to be clear about their mission: it is evangelization, not private education. A reluctance on the part of parents to send their sons and daughters to Catholic schools because they fear they will come to take the gospel seriously would be proof positive of the system's renewed effectiveness.

Such challenges exist also in health and child care, in work with immigrants and the homeless, and in many other ministries. At heart, priests, sisters and brothers are apostles, not professionals. Certainly, they should have all the necessary credentials in their field of expertise—but they must be motivated by the centrality of Jesus in their life and the message of the gospel, not by a need for success.

For men and women religious in the United States today, self-examination is critical for a clear sense of identity. Groups wishing to attract new members cannot avoid it. Some congregations may have to take novel and courageous action to address the challenges they face in this area. For example, they may decide to establish an "independent district" within their congregation and invite members to join it who share a common vision of community and corporate ministry. These individuals would agree to certain fundamental principles about their life and work together.

Some groups fear taking such a step. "Our best people will join this new district," they protest. "Then how will we manage?" But apostolic religious congregations did not come into existence to perpetuate themselves; they were founded for a mission. Also, taking bold action has a bearing on vocations. An increasing number of young people, looking at religious life as a possible commitment, want to be part of something larger than themselves and to work alongside others with the same vision and commitment.

PROMOTION OF VOCATIONS

In April 1997 the murder of 31-year-old teacher Jonathan Levin in New York captured the imagination of the people of that city. From the discovery of his body in a modest Upper West Side apartment until the apprehension of two suspects, not a day passed without the newspapers carrying one or more stories about this remarkable young man.

Some believed that Levin's murder might have escaped public attention if he had not been the son of the chief executive officer of Time Warner Inc. Be that as it may, the simple fact remains that he was a son of privilege who had chosen to serve the children of poverty. He taught at Taft High School, in a violent and economically depressed area of the Bronx.

Here was a man who loved poetry and literature, passing along that passion to young people whose lives were so often devoid of beauty. He stirred in more than one of them a desire to put pen to paper and write. Most especially, however, here was a man of hope who sowed that virtue among those who had almost ceased to believe in themselves. He helped many young men and women to dream about their future, to believe that so much more was possible in their lives, to have greater faith in themselves.

What was it about the life and death of Jonathan Levin that arrested the attention of so many? Was it that he came from wealth but lived simply and frugally? Was it merely that he was a young man in a profession that has in the United States fallen from grace in recent years? Or was it his willingness to go that extra mile with those he taught?

Perhaps Levin was so attractive to a large number of people because he had apparently managed to capture God's dream for him and his life and chosen to live it out fully. This dream of God was not a simple or facile discovery, nor was it easy to carry out. After all, Levin had once confided to a woman he was dating that his life with his students had taught him to be less selfish. He put it this way: "I didn't know how to be giving to others; these kids have shown me the way." One could say that Levin was evangelized by those he served.

What is the purpose of telling the story of this young man and his dream? More important, what do his life and death have to do with the challenge of vocation promotion? The answer is simple: vocation promotion is all about catching dreams in our own lives and in the lives of others. Without a doubt, much fine work to promote vocations is under way within a number of congregations and institutes. We need to acknowledge that and commend those involved. But we also need to admit that members of

some congregations and institutes appear to have forgotten how to carry out an important task: helping young people catch and promote the dream that God has for them and their lives.

The real crisis in vocation promotion in the United States today is not the lack of potential vocations. The crisis we face is our failure to respond creatively to a change in circumstances. Many of us—men and women religious and laity alike—have become immobilized by the new situation we face.

We cannot do anything about the fact that many contemporary families are smaller or more troubled than in the past, or that young people, in general, are choosing to delay the age at which they make major life commitments. Incidents of financial and physical and sexual abuse on the part of men and women religious have caused insufferable harm to victims and tarnished the image of religious life. These are givens. In light of such developments, though, we each need to ask ourselves this question: What have I done lately, in a personal way, to promote even one vocation to my congregation or to another? For many of us the answer is simple: Nothing.

DEADLY SILENCE

The stories of two young men, Tim and Seán, will help illustrate the current failure of many U.S. men and women religious to promote religious vocations. I first met Tim, a young man in his early thirties, when I visited the novitiate where he was a first-year student. More than a decade earlier, Tim had been a student at a school owned and administered by the congregation in which he was a novice. In his last year of secondary school, however, he had decided to enter the novitiate of another congregation that taught at his school.

I wondered what had motivated him to enter this other congregation after secondary school, leave them about a year later, and then several years after that join the formation program of which he was now a member. So I asked him, "Would you tell me just why you entered another congregation twelve years ago?"

"It's really quite simple," he told me. "They asked me to join." He went on to say that he had always wanted to be a member of the congregation in which he was now a novice, but because none of its members had asked him if he had an interest, he assumed that he lacked whatever it took to be one of them.

More striking, however, was Tim's next comment. He told me that when he contacted a member of this same congregation about three years before our meeting to ask about joining, the first thing that person asked him was whether he thought he needed

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more time to be sure about his decision. "I was 31 years of age!" Tim said.

I met Seán recently while visiting his secondary school, where he was vice president of the student body. He was in his final year and planned to go to college after graduation. I asked if he had thought about an area of concentration. "Yes," he said, "education. I'd like to be a teacher." I was surprised, having heard that young people, especially young men, were not looking to education as a career. With my curiosity in full gear, I asked him why he wanted to be a teacher. "Oh," he said, in that innocent and natural way that some teenagers have, "I've gotten a great deal at this school; I'd like to do the same for other young people."

I inquired about his family's reaction to his decision. He said they were supportive. I asked if he had any siblings. "Four brothers and one sister," came the reply. I thought to myself, here is a young man who might possibly consider religious life. He wants to be a teacher; he's a school leader and appears concerned about others; there is more than one child in the family; and his parents seem supportive of what he wants to do with his life.

Later that evening I asked the members of the community of teaching brothers I was visiting what they thought of Seán. "A great kid," was the unanimous reply. Then came my next question: "Has anyone ever asked him if he wants to be a brother?" The response: silence. Fifteen years ago, many of the members of the provinces and districts in that congregation would have targeted that young man as a potential postulant. Today they don't even raise the question.

FOSTERING VOCATIONS

In many parts of the United States today, men and women religious are pessimistic about vocations and the future of their congregations. One went so far as to say, "We have tried everything to promote vocations, even prayer." There is still a great deal more, though, that we can do. We are now largely invisible to young people in this society, but we can open our communities and share our faith and our lives with them. We can tell them our stories: why we came to this way of living, what makes us stay, what joy it brings us. We can invite them personally to consider religious life as a possibility for themselves. Simply stated, we can be for them what we were meant to be: Good News.

We can also work to understand the world in which they live—a world that has to a large extent shaped them. It is not the world from which the majority of contemporary U.S. religious have come. Most sisters, priests, and brothers over age 45 have difficulty realizing that Vatican II and the heady days that followed it are "other people's history" for today's young. The 1980s, not the 1960s, are the touchstone of their reality.

Most members of "Generation X," for example, are not angry at the church. They do not associate most aspects of sexuality with guilt, nor do they hold bitter memories of Catholic-school boyhood or girlhood. Most have never met a nun in a habit; those nuns they do meet look nothing like the pictures they've seen of Mother Teresa.

These young men and women often display a profound ignorance of Catholic dogma. Realizing their lack of knowledge, many take steps to address it. Coming from a world in which the family is in disarray and uncertainty abounds, they look for a church that will not shift beneath their feet.

Prior to Vatican Council II, most Catholic parents thought it a privilege to have a daughter or son in religious life. Today many families are reluctant to support a child seriously considering a vocation as a priest, sister, or brother. If young people are confused about the identity of religious life, their parents are no better enlightened. Men and women religious need to educate them, in word and deed, about the importance of this way of life and the need to foster vocations to our church. Priests, sisters, and brothers also need to encourage their lay colleagues to invite young men and women to consider religious life.

Young people considering religious life today want to be part of something larger than themselves and to live their lives in a way that makes a difference. Without a doubt, they want to give themselves to some-

thing that demands passion and commitment. These young men and women also desire to take seriously what it means to follow Jesus: to serve God in a radical way—a way that can only happen together with others.

They also desire a common life. It can be lived out in a variety of ways, but these young people want to share such a life, in more than a casual way, with others who have the same vision and values. They desire to be part of a community of people whose life together and spirituality are the foundation of its ministry.

Young men and women considering religious life long to be with those who have a passion for ministry and a desire to respond to needs not being met by others. They are not looking for perfect people or those who have all the answers. They do, however, want to align themselves with men and women religious open to collaboration with laity, clergy, and other religious.

Today's potential candidates are often older. One must wonder if this is so partly because many religious have lost the ability to relate to young people. As they age, an increasing number of brothers, sisters, and priests find they are no longer comfortable around young adults. They have lost confidence in their ability to understand the world of young people or to speak their language. This situation must be addressed.

Candidates for religious life also come increasingly from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Men and women religious must introduce into their communities a new sense of multiculturalism if these young people are to ever feel at home. Most important, young people considering religious life today are looking for congregations that believe in their own future.

PARTNERSHIP WITH LAITY

Religious life, lived well, witnesses to the fact that our church is capable of an ecclesiology of communion. Today this witness is more important than ever. All too often, past church actions have betrayed a power-controlled ecclesiology—an outcome antithetical to the principles of the gospel. Men and women religious must, through their life and work together, bear witness to the fact that it can and must be otherwise.

Living together in community, religious can develop an ability to be brothers and sisters to all whose lives they touch. Their sense of community today must include genuine partnership with laypeople. Spirituality is one important element in the lives of religious that can be shared freely with those who

share their congregation's vision and dreams. It is often the element that attracts people to become involved with a particular group.

Charisms are gifts of the Spirit to the church. They are not the personal property of one religious congregation or another. The Society of Jesus, for example, has a special responsibility for keeping Ignatius's spirit and vision alive; Ignatian spirituality, however, is a possession of the entire church.

One of the exciting developments since Vatican Council II has been a renewed interest in the spiritual life. This change is evident not only among men and women religious but among their lay colleagues as well. Many of the latter group have sought out sisters, priests, and brothers to learn more about the charism and spirituality of their congregations. Religious will have little to share in this area, however, if they have not attended to the challenging task of developing an apostolic spirituality for their group. Many laypeople today are interested in helping with this effort—and thus attaining a deeper understanding of life with God as expressed through a particular congregation's apostolic spirituality. All involved are enriched by the collaboration.

Community life is a second area in which priests, sisters, and brothers have a great deal to share with, and a lot to learn from, their lay colleagues. In a country where the structure of family life has eroded alarmingly during the past forty years and where exploitation so often marks relationships, religious witness to what is possible when people decide to live a life together based on gospel principles. Their communities are characterized by a spirit of welcome; tolerance of differences; love; the practice of forgiveness; and members who listen well, withhold judgment, and go the extra mile.

Unfortunately, this ideal is not always realized. At times, the failure of some communities to even approach it borders on scandal. Some laypeople, for example, encounter communities of priests, sisters, and brothers preoccupied with petty concerns. Communication among the members is poor, and mutual respect is sometimes lacking. Some members may even refuse to speak to others in the group or express hostility toward those outside of it. Such situations hardly proclaim the Good News that will attract vocations.

Ministry is another area in which laypeople and religious can share a great deal. Are we willing to enter into full partnership in ministry with our lay colleagues? Can we discuss together what is best for the leaders of institutions, for those they serve, for the long-range goals of the mission? More important, after that conversation, can we act in the best interest of all involved when appointing leaders and

developing teams of people to address the pressing needs that make up the ministry of so many congregations? This area is a painful one for some people; it involves issues of turf, power, and often self-esteem. The gospel of Jesus must be our guide as we move ahead.

Men and women religious, in partnership with laity, can point the way toward the future face of the church. They have a unique opportunity to share their spirituality and ministry with laypeople. In so doing, they give witness to what our church can and must be. But communities of brothers, sisters, and priests will be able to rise to this challenge only if they have a strong sense of identity and sufficient members for genuine partnership. Religious life is but one vocation in the church, no better or no less than any other. Just as John ran ahead of Peter to the tomb on Easter morning, religious life often runs a bit ahead of the People of God. Like John waiting at the mouth of the tomb for Peter, though, it pauses from time to time to let the larger body catch up. That is the challenge U.S. religious life faces today—a challenge that it has the resources to meet.

REDISCOVERING FIRE

Am I optimistic about religious life in the United States? Perhaps hopeful is a better word. Optimism has more to do with our efforts; hope with belief in God's action. We need to do all we can to ensure religious life's future—not for its sake but for the sake of mission. In *My Brother Joseph*, his moving account of thirty years of friendship with Joseph Bernardin, the late archbishop of Chicago, Eugene Kennedy describes his friend's lifelong struggle to surrender so that God could work through him. Men and women religious in the United States today need to not get in the way of God's action. The God who lies at the heart of religious life present and future is a God of unpredictability and risk, passion and fire.

What lies ahead for U.S. religious life? Sober reassessment, courageous action, faith in the presence of Jesus. Men and women religious need to be up and doing. Now is the time for action, before our window of opportunity closes in the United States. A story will

illustrate the urgency of the situation we face. A little over two years ago, at a seminar on the future of religious life in Britain, an older woman religious rose and walked slowly to the microphone. "I've been here more than eight hours now," she said, "and I haven't heard anything new about religious life and its future that I haven't been hearing for the past thirty years. That fact, though, does not bother me, because I think we have known for thirty years now what we need to do to revitalize religious life."

"You know," she went on, "religious life is a bit like a parachute jumper standing in the door of a plane. We have been standing there for thirty years now, looking and judging, looking and judging, looking and judging. Yes," she laughed, "men and women religious have become very good at looking and judging. My question, though, is: When are we going to jump?" She then paused dramatically and said, "Folks, I have some additional bad news: the plane is running out of fuel."

Will young people come once again to religious life in the United States? Yes, we can be sure of it. They will come, however, only when men and women religious have rediscovered fire. Now is the time to do just that.

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The Passion of Anger

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

W

e live in an angry world. Earlier this week, I saw a woman crossing the street in front of a car. She knew the car was coming but was in too much of a rush to stop—nor did she want to stop. With a look of defiance in her eyes, she stepped out, in effect daring the man to hit her. He, also in a rush, was agitated that the woman was forcing him to stop. He ran his car up close to her and then jammed on the brakes. There was so much impatience, so much anger. Was it too much to ask him to drive more courteously? Did she have to jeopardize her own safety and anger him intentionally?

Similarly, a local man was in his car and became angered at the driving of another. While stopped at a traffic light, he got out of his car with a lead pipe in his hand, intending to teach the other man a lesson. Unfortunately, the other man got out of his car with a gun and fired it. The first man pulled his head back and the bullet creased his forehead, landing him in the hospital. Had he not moved, the bullet would have caught him dead center in the head. All this over a simple traffic irritation.

Most frightening—and, I believe, symptomatic of the rising violence in our society—is the increasing number of workplace shootings. Recently, an accountant shot and killed four senior executives at the Connecticut state lottery office and then killed

himself. The past year has seen a number of other workplace shootings by angry employees. This has prompted business consultants to recommend installing secure doors, security buzzers, and armed guards.

Lead pipes and guns, defiance and impatience—these are external manifestations of the anger people carry inside themselves. We live in an angry world.

ANGER IN THE CHURCH

The people who make up our church come from the surrounding society. Thus, one might expect that society's pervasive anger would infect our community of believers. Indeed, it does.

In his presidential address to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 10, 1997, Bishop Anthony Pilla called for a "spirit of repentance and reconciliation" in our church. He lamented the presence of "some very angry voices who apparently feel justified in using a rhetoric of violence." He rejected "hatreds . . . which are spurred on by dismissive and judgmental remarks about church leaders." Bishop Pilla said the church is called to be "the sacrament of unity of humanity."

Anger in our church community also affects priests and religious. When asked to cite issues confronting

Jesus points out that when our passion of anger becomes perverted into contempt and abusive language, we are guilty of a violent sin, just as Cain was guilty

today's clergy, a priest personnel director responded, "anger in the priesthood." A vocation director of a woman's religious congregation shared the story of a prospective candidate who expressed some reservations upon entering the community. When asked to explain, the candidate said she did not want to end up like some of the angry sisters she had met.

Here at Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland, many of the men and women who come to us for healing are filled with a long-standing, deep-seated anger. The smiles have gone from their faces; the joy has left their eyes; they seethe with anger at people who, they believe, have let them down for years. Their feelings of hurt and helplessness have solidified into chronic bitterness. A brief exploration of the phenomenon of anger from both a theological and a psychological perspective may help us understand this anger and identify some of its causes and cures.

PASSIONS MORALLY NEUTRAL

The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes the teachings of the church on anger (#1763–75, 1866, 2259, 2262, 2302). The *Catechism* says that anger in itself is a morally neutral passion. It goes on to name other passions such as love, hatred, desire, fear, joy, and sadness. These passions are the natural components of the human psyche (#1764, 1767). The *Catechism* states clearly that "in themselves, passions are neither good nor evil" (#1767).

This teaching is the moral correlate of the psychological truth that emotions in themselves are not good or bad; they simply exist. Much of the work in

psychodynamic therapy helps clients to face directly the emotions that lie within their psyches. People who believe their emotions are bad and thus should be repressed open themselves to a wide variety of psychological problems. For example, "stuffing" anger, desire, or sadness beneath a stony exterior can contribute to such states as chronic depression and debilitating anxiety.

Many therapists focus on helping clients uncover their buried conflicts and assisting them in living in peace with their passions. This includes facing squarely feelings of anger and sexual desire. The teaching of the *Catechism*—that "in themselves passions are neither good nor evil"—is not only good theology; it is also excellent psychology and should be an encouragement to the work of mental health professionals.

WHERE IS YOUR PASSION?

The *Catechism* takes the point even farther, stating that "the perfection of the moral good consists in man's being moved to the good not only by his will but also by his 'heart'" (#1775) or "sensitive appetite" (#1770). This means not only that the passions or emotions are morally neutral but also that harnessing them in striving toward the good is *essential for true moral perfection*. Living a truly holy life does not mean maintaining a nice, bland exterior that registers a faint smile; it means being a fully alive person who lives each day with passion.

Thus, we must face our emotions directly and integrate them in our lives in a morally healthy way. We cannot be complete and whole people without our emotions directly informing and energizing our lives. This teaching of the Catholic church affirms the work of mental health professionals when they assist their clients in integrating such emotions as anger, desire, joy, and sorrow into their daily lives and becoming "passionate" people. Without this integration, the work of the Holy Spirit is frustrated. As the *Catechism* states, "the Holy Spirit himself accomplishes his work by mobilizing the whole being" (#1769).

I recall working with a man who had serious behavioral problems with alcohol and sexuality, as well as a long-standing depression. In therapy, he said he felt that he had not really lived life; he perceived himself as someone who was outside of life, looking in. It became apparent that he was filled with an inner hurt, anger, and fear that had long been repressed. Underneath his calm exterior was a well of conflicts and pain that drove him to drink and to engage in compulsive sexual behavior, and dampened his mood into a chronic depression. As he got in touch with his inner passions, he began to feel the underlying hurt,

anger, and fear. He sobbed; sometimes he became filled with rage; sometimes he shook with fear. He eventually worked through much of the early trauma of his life and found a new inner harmony. He also overcame his self-destructive behavior and started to re-engage in relationships with others with a renewed passion. It is not surprising that his long-dormant relationship with God began to stir again.

Psychiatrist and Maryknoll sister Maria Rieckelmann often speaks of the importance of living life with passion. I remember her challenge to us during one of her presentations: “Where is your passion?” She challenges each of us in ministry to find that passion. When the passion dies, we die with it. But when we get in touch with and harness the passion within, we come alive.

VIRTUE OR VICE

While the *Catechism* says that the integration of one’s passions is essential for a full and holy life, it offers a word of caution: “Emotions and feelings can be taken up into the *virtues* or perverted by the *vices*” (#1768). Thus, not every emotional expression or discharge contributes to virtue and holiness.

The *Catechism* suggests how to discern whether a passion is used correctly when it says, “Passions are morally good when they contribute to a good action, evil in the opposite case” (#1768). On the other hand, anger giving rise to violence is one of the earliest experiences in the sacred scriptures. Cain resented his brother Abel. As resentment and anger filled him, sin became a “demon lurking at the door” (Gen. 4:6–8). He invited his brother into the field, then attacked and killed him. Because of his violent anger and the ensuing murder, God banned Cain from the soil, and Cain became a restless wanderer. Clearly, Cain’s passion in this instance was not “taken up into virtue,” as the *Catechism* puts it; instead, it was perverted by his own vices. Jesus expands this biblical teaching beyond external actions to the stirrings of the human heart:

You have heard the commandment . . . , “You shall not commit murder; every murderer shall be liable to judgment.” What I say to you is: everyone who grows angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; any man who uses abusive language toward his brother shall be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and if he holds him in contempt he risks the fires of Gehenna. (Matt. 5:21–22)

Jesus’ words are strong; he is teaching with divine authority. He points out that when our passion of anger becomes perverted into contempt and abusive language, we are guilty of a violent sin, just as Cain was

guilty. Jesus is also challenging us to look into the human heart, where we may find the roots of peace or the seeds of violence. When we look into the human heart today, both in society and in our church, we find much anger.

ANGER AS ADDICTION

There are many modern psychological perspectives on violent, destructive anger. Perhaps one of the most interesting is Steven Stosny’s recent discussion of anger as an addiction, found in his book *Treating Attachment Abuse*. Stosny says that the passion of anger normally creates an energy surge and temporarily numbs pain. This has a positive and adaptive function, enabling the human “fight or flight” response. However, people can become addicted to this arousal-and-analgesic effect. He delineates several signs of anger addiction, including the chronic use of anger for energy, pain relief, confidence, a stronger sense of self, or avoidance of depression.

A man came to Saint Luke Institute for treatment of problems with self-esteem, depression, and violent interpersonal behavior. A physically strong person, he would often pick fights over minor irritations and beat others senseless with his fists. This man was addicted to anger, albeit unconsciously, as a way of self-medicating his internal pain and energizing himself out of his depression. Unfortunately, the anger high lasted only long enough for him to get into trouble; then he would fall back into his depressive and painful emotional state to await his next anger high. Stosny would characterize this individual as an “anger junkie.”

THE HELL WITHIN

The first step toward recovery and moving beyond anger addiction is recognizing the anger that exists inside. Many who come to Saint Luke Institute bring within them a simmering anger that shows on their faces and in their eyes. When meeting with these people, one is struck by their barely controlled, chronic rage—yet they deny being angry at all. It is little wonder they have had such difficulties in ministry and in their communities. They have become so inured to their anger that they are no longer even aware of it.

I do not think it would be unfair to describe hell as the state of being consumed by one’s own rage. Satan is rage personified. He is passion corrupted completely by vice. Sad to say, many people on this earth are already living in a type of hell. They are isolated, angry people who rage against everything around

Much of the pervasive anger and barely contained rage in our society is fueled by an increasing feeling of powerlessness

them. However, they do not recognize that the real source of this hell is inside them—a recognition that is essential to the process of healing. Their chronic anger at society is a reflection of the anger within. It is perhaps the same with some of those who chronically rage at the church: the real source of their rage is within. Becoming aware of this inner rage is the first step toward recovery.

FOUR STYLES OF ANGER MANAGEMENT

Once this inner anger is recognized, the second step toward recovery is learning to manage the passion of anger in a positive way. Anger can be manifested in both positive and negative ways. In her article “Improving Your Expression of Anger” (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1996), Janet Malone mentions four styles of anger management. The first three contribute to an inner rage in which anger becomes a destructive force. These dysfunctional styles are passive, aggressive, and passive-aggressive.

The passive way of dealing with anger is to repress the emotion altogether. People who are afraid of rejection by others or afraid of their anger will usually repress this passion. This is especially true of those who have an inordinate need to be liked by others. It is not uncommon for such people to become depressed or simply to become superficial, lackluster people who do not fully engage with others or with God. The repression of anger and the consequent passivity result in an emotional stance towards others that might be expressed as “You win and I lose.”

Passive people have not used their passions to validly energize themselves or to strive toward the good. Instead, they have rejected their passions. Thus, they have closed off some of the very means

that are essential, according to the *Catechism*, for “true moral perfection” and the Holy Spirit’s attempt to mobilize “the whole being.” Women religious are particularly susceptible to this in our society, probably because of deeply embedded societal messages that it is not proper for women—especially women religious—to express anger.

Indeed, there is a consistent temptation in religious life to repress all forms of passion and anger as seeming threats to holiness. However, this is an empty fear. At times we should become angry, just as Jesus did. For instance, Jesus was angry at the closed-mindedness of many around him. These people kept an eye on him, hoping to catch him in the act of violating the Sabbath law. The gospel of Mark tells us, “He looked around at them with anger, for he was deeply grieved that they had closed their minds against him” (3:5). Jesus was also moved to strong passion when he found that his Father’s house had become a “den of thieves.” “He made a kind of whip of cords” and physically drove them out of the temple (John 13–17). Jesus was indeed a person who engaged his passions for virtue.

A close cousin of the passive style of anger management is the passive-aggressive style. In this case, the passion of anger is not completely repressed, but neither is it openly and directly expressed. The person seems to be compliant and obedient, but in reality expresses anger in indirect ways (e.g., through subtle acts of sabotage). The emotional stance toward others might be characterized as “I lose, but you lose too.”

For example, the religious who is angry at authority but afraid to express that anger directly might engage in subtle behaviors to undermine the leader’s authority, all the while feigning obedience. The passive-aggressive person will smile and nod at the leader’s words. But the leader, often inexplicably, finds himself or herself becoming frustrated and upset with this individual.

Those who express anger in the aggressive style are openly dissatisfied and confrontational. They may become chronically caustic and sarcastic. Men in our society are particularly susceptible to this problem. As Bishop Pilla suggests, such aggressive anger and hostility “demeans its user as well as its target.” The emotional stance of aggressively angry people might be summarized as “I win and you lose.”

Those with an aggressive style of anger management are prone to becoming addicted to anger. Their only emotional response is bitterness and sarcasm. Their anger is often used to control and intimidate others, and sometimes to mask the hurt and depression in their own lives. If they were to give up their mask of bitterness, they might find much unhealed pain and sadness underneath.

In each of the three dysfunctional styles of anger management, it is unlikely that the passion of anger will be used for virtue. Instead, because of human weakness and a lack of virtue, this passion will be used as a vice. In each case, the passion of anger becomes destructive, either to the individual or to relationships with others.

HEALTHY EXPRESSION OF ANGER

There is a style of anger management that can lead to wholeness and holiness: the assertive style. In this style, the person expresses anger so that it may become life-giving for both the object of the emotion as well as for the one who is angry. The emotional stance toward others becomes a mutually enhancing “I win and you win.”

An assertive expression of anger springs from a respect for the other person as well as a sense of personal security and empowerment. In the assertive style, the person makes “I” statements that are direct without being aggressive and that inform without demeaning. Instead of fostering defensive confrontation, the assertive style invites dialogue and mutual understanding. Such assertive statements are increasingly possible to make when one feels confident, empowered, and unafraid.

VALID SUPPRESSION

There is another healthy style of anger management that is not often mentioned but one that I believe can be important: the healthy restraint or suppression of the passion of anger. According to Conrad Baars, a Catholic psychiatrist who survived the Nazi concentration camps, people may be conscious of passions yet may at times consciously choose not to express an emotion. Instead of unconsciously repressing a passion, the individual is fully aware of the feeling but decides not to express it for positive reasons. In this case, the emotional stance toward others is, “I choose to let you win.”

For example, it is not uncommon for a therapist to find a client sexually attractive—but it would be a clinical disaster to make a sexual attraction known in the therapeutic environment. Similarly, a valid, deliberate suppression is often necessary for people in ministry. For example, while feelings of anger toward parishioners are common in ministerial leaders, it is often best that this anger be left unexpressed.

Like an assertive style of anger management, a constructive suppression of anger springs from an inner sense of strength and confidence. It is not that the individual is afraid or disempowered; rather, the individual senses that his or her passion, while validly

felt, should not be expressed outwardly. Because the passion is fully conscious and not repressed, this restraint or suppression may even strengthen the person’s self-confidence and sense of personal efficacy. It is in harmony with the mature self-sacrifice suggested in the scriptures.

POWERLESSNESS AND INSECURITY

Without a sense of personal empowerment and self-confidence, individuals slide into a state of powerlessness. Powerlessness mixed with anger easily turns into a consuming rage. I suspect that much of the pervasive anger and barely contained rage in our society is fueled by an increasing feeling of powerlessness. People feel stuck and do not sense they can do anything about it. Feeling helpless and hopeless, they turn to lead pipes and guns, violent words and angry voices.

Assertiveness is possible only with an internal sense of peace and confidence. Unfortunately, there is much internal “dis-ease” and lack of confidence in our society. People are afraid, and they lash out at others to give themselves a feeling of power and self-confidence. Unfortunately, these are two of the reasons Stosny cites for people becoming addicted to anger: to give themselves energy and to build their confidence. One might say that our society itself is becoming addicted to anger. It would be particularly dangerous if that addiction infiltrated our church.

POWERLESS IN CHRIST

There is indeed considerable anger in the church today. No doubt some of this is a righteous passion used for good, like the passion that prompted Jesus to cleanse the temple with a whip of cords. However, there is some destructive anger as well. The humanity of our church shows considerable virtue; it also shows some vice. As the *Catechism* suggests, this vice will necessarily distort morally neutral passions until they become seeds of conflict and violence.

Bishop Pilla, in his words to his brother bishops, pointed out that there is a special need to address the divisiveness and interpersonal violence in the church today. He said that full reconciliation in the church will come about only when we are united in the truth and the truth is spoken in love. Bishop Donald Wuerl, in his pastoral letter *Speaking the Truth in Love: Christian Discourse Within the Church*, echoed those themes. He rejected the “rancor, mistrust and hatred” within our Christian community. He said, “Christians must not only speak the truth but must also do so in love.”

When Christians fall prey to “rancor, mistrust and hatred,” their expression of anger is aggressive, and they are engaging in destructive behavior. As Bishop Pilla stated, there is “no room” in the gospel for “angry voices and . . . violent language.” However, when the truth is spoken in love, assertive behavior is being used, which builds up the Body of Christ.

These are not new problems, as Saint Paul’s letter to the Galatians testifies: “If you go on biting and tearing one another to pieces, take care. You will end up in mutual destruction” (5:15). This divisiveness and destruction are particularly devastating to a church whose very identity is realized in unity and mutual charity.

Paradoxically, true Christianity finds its power and confidence in a recognition of human powerlessness. As Saint Paul writes, “I willingly boast of my weaknesses instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9,10).

The Christian comes to realize that it is futile to seek power and confidence in an ever-changing world. Such a search leads only to frustration and despairing helplessness. This world cannot give a firm sense of inner security or peace. It cannot quiet the human heart. Underneath its seeming stability is a confidence-eroding sense of unpredictability.

I believe that we must recognize and accept our own human powerlessness and fundamental insecurity, as difficult as that task is, while finding our confidence in God. Grasping at power and security in a world that can ultimately deliver neither is futile and frustrating. It is little wonder that our world is angry.

Would it be too simplistic to suggest to the man with the lead pipe to admit his human powerlessness? Would the woman in the street scoff if it were suggested to her that she find her strength not in staring down a man in his car but in embracing Christ? Perhaps underneath their bravado and anger, these people feel insecure and helpless. It is only a short leap of faith to entrust such feelings to the One who is a “sure and firm anchor” (Heb. 6:19).

CALL FOR COMPASSION

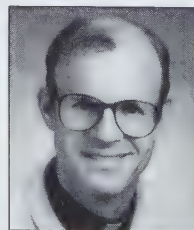
At the risk of sounding a little like a preacher, I would remind our readers that we who profess to be

followers of Jesus should recognize that God must be the source of our power and peace. Yet some of us—perhaps all of us, at times—are still possessed by anger. Indeed, the process of complete conversion is a long one. We all harbor reserves of anger, little pockets of “hell,” in our hearts.

Thus, the energizing passion of anger is perverted by our own imperfections and spiritual pride. If we in the church were to harness this God-given passion more fully instead of “tearing one another to pieces,” the church would be wonderfully energized. The Spirit would flow more freely in our community of faith. But as it is, we are a church in the process of conversion, not a church triumphant. The members of our community are on the road to perfection; they have not yet reached the finish line.

We might match a call for reconciliation in the church with a call for patience and compassion. The rancor and violence in the church can be quelled with a patient understanding of the weakness of its members. Not only should we be patient with the weaknesses of others; we should also honestly face and be compassionate with our own. The “perfection” of the church lies not in the individual perfection of its members but in the perfection of its head, who is Christ, and in the power of its animator, the Holy Spirit.

The seeds of violence and destructive anger, which surfaced in the offspring of Adam and Eve, continue to plague the unity of humankind and our church down through the ages. Saint Paul suffered with it; we suffer with it too.



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Discerning God's Will

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

Our spiritual journey does not always guide us along smoothly paved and well-lighted pathways. Occasionally, our experiences in the spiritual life can lead us to wonder if we are on the road at all—if we are indeed moving in the direction of responding to and doing God's will. And, of course, we are confronted with the ever-present challenge of knowing God's will. Such knowledge is no guarantee that our spiritual pathways will be paved and lighted, but it could give us a refreshed confidence and conviction for continuing our journey.

In general, we do know God's will. It is revealed clearly through the life, teaching, and example of Jesus of Nazareth. However, from time to time in our life, instances emerge in which God's will is not so clear for us; at least its exact application is not evident. At such times we sense that we must search more intently for what God is asking of us. Traditionally, that search is referred to as discernment.

Etymologically, *discernment* means "to separate apart"—that is, to distinguish something so it can be perceived clearly. This is the challenge confronting us in daily life. In the midst of our many tasks and responsibilities, in the flurry of activities, we need to separate apart God's will precisely so it can be recognized and implemented. That we must desire to know God's will may be obvious to us, but the process

for nurturing that desire and coming to that knowledge may not be so apparent.

This article identifies some principles of discernment by examining one experience of a familiar biblical character, Samuel: his identification and anointing of the shepherd boy David to be the future king of Israel. Usually, commentaries on this story in chapter 16 of the first book of Samuel focus on David and the significance of his selection as successor to King Saul. However, when read with the spotlight on Samuel's experience of his own commission and task, the story reveals some basic truths about discernment.

A STORY RETOLD

The immediate context of David's selection to be king is Saul's disobedience in following God's commands. Chapter 15 of the First Book of Samuel indicates that because the Amalekites were among those who had persecuted the people of Israel upon their departure from Egypt, God orders Saul to "utterly destroy all that they have; [not to] spare them" (15:3). But Saul spares their king and takes "the best of the sheep and the cattle and the lambs, and all that [is] valuable" (15:9). God then tells Samuel, "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned

from following me, and has not carried out my commands" (15:10). Samuel confronts Saul with God's word, and in fact completes the original command himself by killing King Agag of the Amalekites. Even after all this, however, "Samuel grieved over Saul" (15:35).

Chapter 16 opens with the following story (the verse numbers are indicated for convenient reference):

1) Yahweh said to Samuel, "How much longer do you mean to go on mourning over Saul, now that I myself have rejected him as ruler of Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have found myself a king from among his sons."

2) Samuel replied, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it he will kill me." Yahweh then said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh.'"

3) "Invite Jesse to the sacrifice," Yahweh continued, "and I myself will tell you what to do; you will anoint for me the one I indicate to you."

4) Samuel did what Yahweh ordered and went to Bethlehem. The elders of the town came trembling to meet him and asked, "Seer, is your coming favorable for us?"

5) "Yes," he replied. "I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He purified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6) When they arrived, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely this must be Yahweh's anointed now before him."

7) But Yahweh said to Samuel, "Take no notice of his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him; God does not see as human beings see; they look at appearances, but Yahweh looks at the heart."

8) Jesse then called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel, who said, "Yahweh has not chosen this one either."

9) Jesse then presented Shammah, but Samuel said, "Yahweh has not chosen this one either."

10) Jesse thus presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "Yahweh has not chosen any of these."

11) He then asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is looking after the sheep." Samuel then said to Jesse, "Send for him, for we shall not sit down to eat until he arrives."

12) Jesse had him sent for; he had ruddy cheeks, with fine eyes and an attractive appearance. Yahweh said, "Get up and anoint him: he is the one!"

13) At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him, surrounded by his brothers; and the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon David from that day onward. Samuel, for his part, set off and went to Ramah.

EXAMINING A DISCERNMENT

The story of this discernment opens with Samuel sulking in his grief because God has rejected Saul. Samuel appears almost dysfunctional, doing nothing but brooding. On one hand, he is angry at Saul because of the blatant disobedience; he expected more of Saul. On the other hand, he cannot imagine Saul other than as God's anointed one. Now that Saul has been rejected, now that life as Samuel has known it has changed, what will become of Israel? And so the sulking goes on.

Though our own experiences in the spiritual journey may not be as dramatic as Samuel's, we can know and feel the distress of significant life changes. It is uncomfortable and disconcerting when something familiar and unchangeable (at least from our perspective) is no longer a stable and regular part of our everyday life and experience. Like Samuel, we too may "go on mourning" over what is no longer the reality, over what cannot be. We can slip into a type of dysfunctionality in which little if any forward movement is evident in our life. This indicates our need to explore what is going on at this point in our journey and to discern what needs to be done so we can continue on our way.

God commissions Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint a new king. Not surprisingly, Samuel questions the wisdom of this because of the obvious danger and political risk involved. He is well aware—and informs God—that Saul, rejected or not, certainly would kill anyone who would dare to threaten his possession of the throne. God then gives Samuel a politicoreligious cover: go to Bethlehem equipped to offer sacrifice; such a journey will not raise any suspicions. Finally, God further specifies Samuel's mission: invite Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice; what to do and whom to anoint will be indicated.

Though we may not be so formally commissioned, God will communicate to us—perhaps through friends, loved ones, a spiritual director—that we have become stalled and now must continue the journey. We may even have a sense of what is to be done. And we may question and protest all this because we know it will only take us deeper into the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable. Still, it is often precisely through the suggestions, encouragement, and support of those who know us well that we discover how to move beyond our questions and protests so we can do what needs to be done. The challenge is to be willing and to listen, trust, and try.

So Samuel goes to Bethlehem—and, of course, his arrival causes a stir. However, he says and does just as the Lord has instructed him, and his entrance into the city goes smoothly.

When we take those first tentative steps into unfamiliar territory during a discernment, not all may go as smoothly as suggested by those who encouraged us. The temptation is to pronounce a resounding “I told you so” and retreat to our earlier immobility. Our willingness must go beyond those first steps. It must include the decision not to turn back, even when contending with contradictory desires. There can never be a firm guarantee that everything will go smoothly. But as we go forward, we will be acting with faith and trust—and with the confidence built upon them.

Jesse and his sons arrive. Samuel looks and immediately assumes that the firstborn son, Eliab, is the chosen one. This is not an inappropriate assumption for Samuel to make so quickly. His relatively smooth entrance into the city dispelled his initial trepidation, refreshing his confidence and self-assurance concerning his capabilities for this mission. Furthermore, it is simply customary in his culture that the blessing, the inheritance, the favored choice are bestowed upon the firstborn son. And Eliab’s bearing supports Samuel’s assumption.

Our willingness to listen, trust, and try as we continue our journey makes us confident and self-assured as we approach the principal task of our discernment. There is, however, a shadow side to this. Confidence and self-assurance, though solid gifts that contrast sharply with our previous hesitation, can generate a false sense of certainty within us. While this sense cannot accurately be described as arrogance, it can make us somewhat rash in our assessment of and response to possible means for completing that principal task. The hazard in this is impatience, which tends to determine God’s will, not discern it. What is before us can appear so obvious, so correct, that we simply decide what is to be done without asking further questions, without listening for additional information. And with that decision, we assume that we have discerned and done God’s will.

God’s response to Samuel’s assumption articulates a fundamental principle distinguishing the means of interpretation used by humanity from those used by God. Using the senses as primary channels for receiving information, humanity interprets, judges, and decides on the basis of externals. By contrast, God looks to the heart of the person, disregarding appearances and other externals.

This is an essential principle of discernment. To equate the data received through observation with an accomplished discernment is to ignore the deeper exploration and examination necessary for making a truly discerned decision. Observation in itself is insufficient. It does not probe intensely enough; it limits us to the information we have gathered from

the immediately perceptible. Such information is valuable, but it is only a beginning—a first point to examine. It cannot be designated as a definite indication of God’s will, for God “looks at the heart.” That is, God sees and understands our identity, even as we pray in the words of Psalm 139:

Lord, you search me and know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my deepest thoughts from far away. Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? For it was you who created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. (1–2,7,13)

Similarly, we must search beyond the surface of appearances to discover the identity, the heart, the true nature of the situation we are interpreting.

Samuel must have assimilated the Lord’s teaching on looking at and approaching this task from a new perspective. He is no longer so impulsive about summing up the situation; he has become more attentive to God’s way of discerning and deciding. However, by the end of verse 10, we begin to wonder what Samuel will do next. He has done exactly as the Lord has instructed him, and nothing has come of it. The seven sons have been presented, and the Lord has not chosen one of them for anointing. Samuel himself may have wondered what to do next.

As we continue along the pathways of our discernment and strive to look beyond appearances, to ask and probe for whatever information we believe will assist us, it is unsettling to be confronted with an apparent dead end. This is especially true when we have made efforts to move beyond our initial hesitations and superficialities and are, in fact, making some progress. It is important at such junctures to maintain a sense of hope, of willingness to continue. The temptation is to succumb to discouragement, to accept the perspective that the process has been a waste of the time and energy thus far expended. Maintaining a sense of hope does not pretend away our feelings in the face of what looks to be an impasse. Rather, it is a challenge to consider the possibility that not every option has been identified, not every question has been asked. We must at least ponder that possibility before summarily deciding to discontinue the journey of discernment.

Rather than immediately assuming that no alternatives remain, Samuel asks Jesse the most simple and logical of questions, given the situation: “Are these all the sons you have?” It is a particularly interesting question at this point, even somewhat unexpected. Samuel could have assumed—logically—that in presenting these seven, Jesse had introduced all his sons. Realizing that logic had failed him

before, when he had assessed Eliab, Samuel explores the “illogical” and discovers there is indeed an eighth son. This discovery is so significant that Samuel delays any further activity until this youngest son has arrived.

As we consider other options and formulate additional questions, we may find it helpful to ask for assistance from our spiritual director or someone in whom we usually confide. Such assistance gives us another perspective, which can provide the impetus we need to reexamine a possibility we had previously dismissed as illogical. Asking for this assistance requires the self-knowledge to recognize the need for resources beyond the self, and the humility to actively seek the support of those resources. At this point, if we remain stubbornly self-contained, we completely compromise the authenticity and accuracy of our discernment.

Given the glowing description of David as he enters the scene, it might be expected that Samuel would jump to a quick conclusion, as he had done regarding Eliab. But prudence prevails; Samuel does and says nothing. He waits and listens. Then the Lord speaks: the Lord commands the anointing; the Lord indicates the person. The son who was almost overlooked is the chosen one. Samuel acts, and the Spirit of God moves definitively upon David. His work now completed, Samuel returns to his home in Ramah.

The indication and verification of God’s will for us within our discernment may be much more subtle than it was for Samuel when he was told of David, “He is the one!” Nowhere along the pathways of discernment will we find a promise that our discovery of God’s will is certain to be indisputably evident. For as Saint Paul teaches us, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Nevertheless, we will come to a point in our discernment at which we believe and trust that we have all the data necessary or sufficient for a decision based on truth and wisdom. Very often, that belief and trust are affirmed and confirmed by our spiritual director and others with whom we have shared the process of our discernment. Then we set off to continue our life’s journey with the insight, grace, and growth with which God has blessed us through the discernment.

A REFLECTION ON PRINCIPLES

Like many biblical stories, that of Samuel’s journey to Bethlehem to identify and anoint the future king of Israel lends itself to a multifaceted meditation. Let us consider the story in the light of two principles of discernment that emerge from it.

The first principle centers on the participants within a discernment. Often there is a tendency to

regard—and thus to approach—discernment as an activity of the first person singular: I am in a process of discerning God’s will for me. On the surface, this is not incorrect, as we must be involved personally in identifying God’s will for us. But without additional qualifiers, this statement sounds isolationist, implying a mode of operation in which discernment is a personal and private quest with no reference to external resources for support and counsel. Samuel’s story teaches us that discernment is not limited to the boundaries of the self.

Samuel’s discernment obviously includes himself. In fact, he initially tends to act on his own, rapidly assuming that Eliab is the chosen one (16:6). In so doing, Samuel functions as if he has completely forgotten the instructions he received earlier (16:3). Although a bit impetuous, he is an active participant in this discernment. His self-reliance, however, must be balanced by a lesson from the Lord (16:7).

Then Samuel’s discernment includes God. The lesson teaches him God’s way of interpretation, challenging him to look beyond what is perceived by appearances. Thus, Samuel’s estimation of the remaining sons who are present (16:8–10) reflects a confidence based on what the Lord has taught him. Nevertheless, that estimation results in an apparent dearth of available options. Only Jesse can provide the information Samuel needs.

Samuel’s discernment includes yet another person. Apart from Jesse and the crucial information he provides, Samuel might have concluded that his work was completed and that God must have been mistaken about finding the future king among Jesse’s sons. However, Samuel has learned to use all available resources for discerning God’s will.

The first principle to be drawn from this is that discernment, while personal, is not private. In this journey, we seek to know God’s will for us as individuals, but our search is not completely solitary. God’s will is mediated; therefore, we must be attentive to whatever and whomever could offer us further insight for knowing and understanding that will. There are at least three participants in a true discernment: the individual, the Lord, and the companion. The companion may be a spiritual director, a confidant, or more than one person accompanying us on the journey. Thus, “at least three” should not be interpreted as “only three.”

Without all three participants, the integrity of discernment is compromised. If we exclude God and those who can assist us, discernment degenerates into little more than presumption and self-righteousness—an activity of “me alone.” If we exclude our companions, thus approaching discernment as “God and me,” then we move toward a

fundamentalism that does not acknowledge the need for some means of critiquing the authenticity of our interpretations and the wisdom of our decisions. The inclusion of others is often the forgotten or neglected component in a discernment, at least in the beginning. In both cases—"me alone" and "God and me"—genuine discernment is jeopardized.

The second principle that emerges from Samuel's story concerns the period of time necessary for discernment. Though a prescribed interval cannot be established for application in every instance, discernment does have a beginning and an end. Often, discernment is described as a process, emphasizing that it is a progression to be followed, not a prescription to be filled. This process is incarnational, insofar as we are seeking God's will for us in a particular context regarding a distinct situation or issue. The implicit goal is to complete the search as effectively as possible to benefit our spiritual growth and our quality of life. To extend the process indefinitely—approaching it with no reference to some end point—is merely deferment, not discernment.

Without doubt, there are times when additional information is necessary before a decision can be made. In fact, to varying degrees, additional information will always be necessary. But we must distinguish between essential information and that which, though helpful, remains peripheral. We must be willing to make preliminary decisions regarding the sufficiency of material at our disposal for a particular discernment. We must be willing to arrive at a point at which we accept what we have discovered as God's will for us.

Discernment is a journey in faith, not an experiment in scientific analysis. As the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (11:1). We hope to know God's will, yet we do not see it for lack of certainty. It is precisely in response to this reality that the power of our faith gives substance and evidence. We believe through hope; we believe without seeing. To delay the continuation and thus the conclusion of our discernment on the grounds that we must have absolute certainty before proceeding is to render our faith useless. In truth, we will contradict any claim that we have faith. If we cannot make this journey with the light of faith, then in effect we journey with no light at all.

There are surely other principles that touch the nature and practice of discernment. Our formulation of the questions to be used as the discernment

unfolds will determine its quality and progress. The role of our spiritual director and of other companions on the journey will affect our interpretations of the information we receive. The resources we choose will influence our perspectives. Our mode of prayer may need adjustment and adaptation during the discernment. Any exploration of these principles lies beyond the scope of these reflections. The two principles highlighted here, though, are particularly important for avoiding the common pitfalls of isolation and procrastination.

DESIRE IS ESSENTIAL

Discernment is a journey in faith. A fundamental challenge within the faith needed for this journey is precisely our acceptance of God's promise to Samuel: "I myself will tell you what to do." Do we believe this for our own lives? Do we believe that God's will is accessible, that it will be revealed? The alternative is to characterize God's will as so mysterious and distant that we relegate it to the category of the completely incomprehensible. Without doubt, we must do our part; we must take up the journey of discernment; we must look and listen and seek to discover. We must accept that the journey is possible. Above all, we must desire to know God's will, and we must want to carry it out.

The very first biblical stories that introduce us to the prophet Samuel provide glimpses of his early life as a minister in the Lord's temple under Eli's guidance. One story relates Samuel's first recognition of and encounter with the Lord, an event for which he has been coached by Eli. Upon hearing the Lord, Samuel's learned response is simple and direct: "Speak, Lord; your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10). Thus begins Samuel's relationship with the Lord; after that, "Samuel grew up and Yahweh was with him" (3:19). We must learn this same response, not for a moment in life but throughout life for all aspects of life. Then we too will grow in union with the Lord, discerning and doing his will.



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The Third Age

(An Alternating Current)

James Torrens, S.J.

I'd foreseen orange, purple and red firing
the October woods, the air crisp, three brands
of oak leaf underfoot and, like the palms of hands,
stained maple. It's how I thought of aging.
But the park took me aback today, all brown
and yellow, soggy and choked with creepers,
a replay of those old rainy day odors
of galoshes, oilskins and children damped down.
Then came some rain pattering overhead.
Not a wing or a squirrel's stir. In the hush
no utterance, simply a breath, a presence.
The all clear will blow, I thought, and red
show again in the crown of trees, but this brush
of a wintry breath carries the essence.

The graying of America and other First World societies is patent. Politically, it translates into the voting power of the American Association of Retired Persons and tensions about funding Medicare and Social Security. Ethically, it translates into debates about physician-assisted suicide and allotment of health care resources. Socially, however, it translates into an enormous, undervalued input from those now being called "the young old" (to distinguish them from "the frail elderly")—those roughly between 65 to 75 years of age and still reasonably well.

A case in point is the prominence of seniors in the recent campaign to close the School of the Americas in Columbus, Georgia—a U.S.-run training ground in counterinsurgency for Latin American regimes. Yearly on November 16, the anniversary of the murders at the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador, protesters have gathered outside the school, some marching onto the grounds to voice opposition and perform nuisance actions. Of the 601 arrested last fall, 22 were sentenced on January 20 by Judge Robert Elliott to six months in jail and a \$3,000 fine. This meant, in particular, an influx of seniors into federal prisons—some Unitarians from Syracuse, three Catholic sisters, a priest, clergymen, and others. What a show of grit and remarkable sense of freedom.

These days, many of the gadfly organisms so vital to the commonweal are propelled by the retired and semiretired. Among these groups are environmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations with an overseas reach, and, among Catholics, Birthright and so much of the pro-life movement. Typical is the recent appearance of the Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps, taking its cue from the Jesuit Volunteer Corps—the latest example of older people harnessing the desire to give back, out of gratitude.

This awareness of the energy of what both the East and West have long called "the Third Age" comes as a breath of relief amid so much attention to the failing health of the elderly and so much debate about

the ending of their lives. It also serves as a counterpoint to the emphasis on fun, travel, sequestration in the Sun Belt, and excess of self-concern.

The fruitful activity of seniors revolves most often around the ancient role of grandparenting. Most grandparents, who are still the most reliable babysitters and cherished companions, act as such in their “discretionary time” as a pleasure and privilege, or at least as a temporary chore. The concept of grandparenting can be stretched to apply to mentors, counselors, and available neighbors. Upwards of four million women in the United States, unfortunately, have to grandparent pretty much full-time. At an age when they should be free of round-the-clock pressures, they have to take up the slack left by a middle generation.

In *Abundance of Life: Human Development Policies for an Aging Society*, Harry R. Moody, director of the Brookdale Center on Aging at Hunter College in New York City, elucidates the value of interchange between generations, the kind that cannot take place in adult communities: “The deeper dimension of life, a dimension of meaning, is to be found in those cultural forms—of ritual and continuity between generations—that give intelligibility to the last stage of life.”

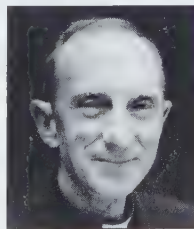
That life have meaning—this is the top priority in the Third Age. The deficiency model, with its focus on energies running down, can be truly fatal, leaving us in old age with a block of empty time, abandoned to the television set. Moody points out that even vigorous activity, the kind fostered by clubs and senior centers, can be a far cry from “sustained meaning.”

The wisdom model of approach to aging draws deeply from the world religions. It situates one’s life in a large framework. It accepts personal limitations and failures past and present with calmness and humor, intent on fostering “solidarity, compassion and humaneness” (Allert, Spanholz, and Baitsch in the *Hastings Center Report*, September/October 1994; in their study of aging, Germans have been the most active). Lifelong education, as promoted by Elderhostel and so many university programs, has the aim of developing human capacities and the inner life. It is

not true that old dogs can’t learn new tricks or that the elderly can’t change. The essential in these late-life programs of learning, just as for schooling at an early age, is not information so much as meaning—the big questions and the available answers—what nourishes in an individual not just the hobbyist and gardener and cook but the world citizen and the child of God.

To put the matter in a nutshell, the Third Age is meant to be a contemplative time. Hinduism has a sense of this, establishing its pavilions where the elderly can look toward their reincarnation. If the Western world took this to heart, what an immensely contemplative state Florida would be! The fact is that even the young old, those still active and productive, need the guarantee of a breathing space. We (if I may slip into that pronoun) dearly need our times of quiet, or even silence, not just for looking around and listening close (“tasting the vanilla,” as my father used to say) but also for communing with the One who is both mystery and nearness, source of the cosmos and Good Shepherd.

The Third Age, then, is an alternating current—active and contemplative. We can still play a zestful role in the human family while treasuring those times when all is still and the heart steady. An idealized picture? Well, it does have to include that unpleasant running down of the body. But just look at those who are negotiating this time well. With the help available, it can be done. And all the mysteries of this period of our lives—aloneness, disability, mental quirks, slowing memory—signal unmistakably: “The Lord is near.”



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Stress in the Lives of Women Religious

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

Lifestyle changes stimulated by Vatican II sought to reduce stress in the communal lives of women religious by eliminating elements that stemmed from the application of a monastic or medieval model of life that was no longer in harmony with the needs and demands of the modern world. Recently, more than thirty years after the initial changes were introduced, it seemed appropriate to determine if the goal of stress reduction via lifestyle changes had been effective. Members of two communities—one that considered itself traditional and one that viewed itself as transitional—responded to an open-ended questionnaire addressing various sources of stress, symptoms of stress, and preferred coping strategies. The study was reported last year at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.

As anticipated, the responses to the questionnaire indicated that the sources of stress in the pre-Vatican II communities were highly similar. Whether the area of stress addressed was related to the organizational or ministerial life of the community or was located within the interpersonal or intrapersonal sphere, a high level of agreement was found between the two groups, as well as among the members of each group.

For example, when questioned about sources of stress identified in the pre-Vatican II communities at

the organizational level, members of both groups cited high levels of structure and regimentation, demand for uniformity, and lack of flexibility in the daily schedule. Additionally, members of both groups mentioned stress arising from limited family contact, large community settings, and lack of privacy, as well as a loss of autonomy, the demand for “perfection,” and the unrewarding nature of a system that gives recognition only for failure.

While certain differences were noted between the two groups, there were also many points of similarity when current sources of stress were identified. Far more striking, however, was the highly individual nature of stress within the groups following Vatican II. Clearly, one size does not fit all when an effort is made to achieve stress reduction via changes in lifestyle.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRESSORS

At the organizational level, for example, members of the traditional group noted stress arising from the number of community meetings required and the “unchanging” nature of leadership roles, while the members of the transitional group complained of a “lack of community” and excessive “democratization.” “Individualism” and “doing one’s own thing”

were cited as sources of stress by many of the older respondents of that group. "Lack of community" was defined in terms of a lack of a formal prayer structure, which in turn was equated with a lack of community support. Both groups agreed that the effort required to balance personal preferences with the demands of the common good resulted in high levels of stress. In particular, time constraints and difficulties in harmonizing the personalized schedules of the various members of the local community were frequently cited as sources of stress, as the members of each group perceived a greater demand for their presence at community meetings to share in the decision-making process.

Many within the traditional community, which had made very few changes in its constitutions, as well as a number of those in the transitional community, felt that the changes that had been made resulted in a failure to live up to the spirits of their respective founders. Conversely, others in both groups felt that far too little change had been effected and that many more changes were needed in the organizational structures of the community. A number of sisters indicated that they found it stressful to have more personal responsibility and to be more accountable for living out their stated priorities. In regard to their expectations of community, some pointed to role confusion experienced by superiors and sisters alike. Several sisters noted that the increased freedom in their lives had led them to ask themselves, "Am I a good community person?" This is not necessarily a negative finding, but those reporting it tended to link it with arousal of anxiety. "Freedom to come and go can be a real killer for community life" was a response that seemed to sum up their concerns.

Altered perceptions and interpretations of the vow of poverty were cited frequently as sources of tension among community members, now that the individual sisters have both more freedom and more responsibility in handling their personal finances. Tension stemming from a long-standing sense of deprivation seemed to be expressed at times in a sense of entitlement to have "the best" and to "be first." The perception that younger members of the community were not receiving an adequate formation and, as a result, did not know how to handle their responsibilities also contributed to a high level of stress in this area.

STRESS IN MINISTRY

Emphasis on the workload dominated the responses on stress in the ministerial area. Members of both groups expressed fears for the future because recruitment of new members was sharply reduced, the number of sisters reaching retirement age was in-

creasing, and sisters engaged in active ministry were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the workload, which had not diminished. The amount of work to be accomplished, the long hours required for work, the exaggerated demands and unrealistic expectations of those served, the sense of "always being on call," and the increase in paperwork necessitated by government and other regulations were the sources of stress most frequently cited.

Another significant source of stress in ministry related to the loss of a sense of "ownership" because certain positions traditionally held by community members were now held by nonmembers. The presence of fewer sisters serving in a particular mission tended to give rise to feelings of loneliness, while the fact that ministries are now more individualized left many respondents, especially in the transitional group, experiencing a sense of fragmentation of effort and mourning the loss of a common ministerial base.

Although members of both groups had likened their community's former way of making assignments to "filling holes," several members of the transitional group indicated that the need to find one's own job was, in certain respects, even more stressful, as it required that they compete for positions with other religious and with laypersons. Assurance of being accepted and a sense of "job security" could no longer be taken for granted. In addition, considerations such as the salary attached to a particular position or the proximity of the work site to the residence of one's aging parents played a much more significant role in the choice of ministry than they had in the past. As a result, some sisters reported feeling that their overall sense of "mission" was diminished.

INTERPERSONAL ISSUES

Both groups agreed that in their pre-Vatican II community life, the major source of stress in the interpersonal area related to the fact that close relationships and emotional intimacy were actively discouraged by their superiors due to a fear, largely unacknowledged, of lesbian relationships. Today, however, differing expectations of community living constitute one of the sources of stress most often identified by the respondents. Many sisters noted problems arising from superiors' disapproval of their relationships with persons outside the local community and indicated that allocating the time and energy to establish and nourish significant relationships, both within and outside the local community, was a significant source of stress. Others wrote poignantly about the loss of friends because of reassignment, departure from the community, or death. Sisters in the

transitional group were far more likely to report a sense of loneliness and a lack of close and supportive relationships. They were also more likely to express anger at what they perceived to be a "double standard" that allowed those living in close proximity to their families far greater contact than was possible for those living at a distance. Members of both groups noted that financial considerations increased the stress due to actual distance.

While the sisters living in the pre-Vatican II communities had complained about the large size of the local groups, newcomers—especially those in the transitional group, who entered after smaller groups became the norm—reported an alternative source of stress. They indicated that they found it difficult to "break into the group" because each house tended to have its own small-group culture in which it was difficult to feel included. Some addressed "inner rings" of relationships that were exclusionary and that led to divisiveness and the formation of cliques.

Another major source of stress associated with small community settings related to the problems encountered in living with sisters who have severe personality disorders. Much anger was directed toward superiors who were seen as not addressing such problems adequately. As the "buffering effect" provided by living in larger groups and observing periods of silence is no longer available, it has become increasingly necessary for sisters to learn to deal with conflict and anger in a more assertive manner. This shift in the community culture has been stressful. So has dealing with problems such as withdrawal and the holding of grudges, which contribute to problems in giving and receiving forgiveness. The need to learn to accept the limitations of self and others while continuing to feel loved and valued was noted as an ongoing source of stress.

INTRAPERSONAL STRESS

In assessing the intrapersonal stressors operative in their lives today, members of the traditional group indicated that they experienced a strong desire for increased autonomy, flexibility, recognition of individual differences, and personal freedom. Members of the transitional group, on the other hand, focused attention on the need to balance their roles within their families and communities while continuing to care for themselves. Many sisters pointed to unmet needs for intimacy as a source of intrapersonal stress. Some experienced this as tension arising from unfulfilled desires for deeper friendships, while others highlighted a lack of bonding at the local community level. Stress arising from a sense of loneliness

and loss was especially noted by members of the transitional group. Members of both groups cited a desire for greater intimacy with God and noted a need for increased sharing on the spiritual level.

An additional source of stress was reported by respondents who were either semiretired or retired. A number of these sisters experienced stress because of their feeling of being "put aside" or "not needed," and some spoke of a "values gap" between themselves and other members of the community. They noted a lack of inner peace, characterized by feelings of anxiety and depression, and indicated a need for new self-definition as they entered the later stages of life.

STRESS IS INEVITABLE

The results of the questionnaire clearly indicated that stress is a fact of life and cannot be eliminated entirely. Sources of stress may change, but every situation has some inherent level of stress. As one source of stress is diminished or eliminated, the very fact of change introduces another. Rather than look for a stress-free existence, each sister must take responsibility for her life choices and learn positive mechanisms for coping with the normal stresses of life. Learning to integrate such opposites as community needs and the need for outside relationships is essential in reducing stress. In some groups this is achieved by expanding the definition of who or what constitutes "community." In other groups or at certain times, however, it is necessary to look to the need to more narrowly define community in order to maintain an appropriate level of intimacy.

A second and perhaps somewhat surprising finding was that the sources of stress currently reported by members of the two groups are very similar in many areas, despite the fact that changes in the government, community, and ministerial structures of the traditional group have been neither as numerous nor as extensive as those of the transitional group. Apparently, the relatively small changes reported by the traditional group have significantly altered the members' identification of sources of stress in their lives. It is clear that the changes introduced by Vatican II, which occurred in conjunction with significant sociopolitical changes in our country, have had an impact even on communities that continue to identify themselves as traditional.

A third factor worth considering is the "grass is always greener" phenomenon. Many sisters in the transitional group complained of confusion resulting from changes that they described as "too much, too soon." In contrast, their peers in the traditional group wished for greater change and felt their community

needed to move forward more quickly. For example, members of the traditional group expressed a desire for greater autonomy in selecting their own jobs and ministries, while members of the transitional group reported that their increased autonomy was a source of stress that had not been part of their pre-Vatican II lives.

BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS

The questionnaire also explored the nature of stress-related behavioral symptoms observed in oneself and in others. One frequently cited constellation of symptoms included irritability and a low tolerance for frustration, which was expressed most often in verbal expressions of impatience, anger, and complaint. The sisters reported short tempers, raised voices, emotional outbursts, critical comments, and indirect (passive-aggressive) expressions of anger as indicators of stress.

While many respondents did not identify subjective feelings of depression, symptoms from the depressive spectrum far surpassed those involving anger and irritability. Sleep disturbance, withdrawal, and feelings of isolation were the symptoms most often reported. In addition, lack of concentration, preoccupation and brooding over hurts, overeating, and tearfulness were reported frequently. Silence, moodiness, coldness, and divorcing oneself from community activities were the most commonly observed symptoms of social and emotional withdrawal.

Another major cluster of stress symptoms included various physical problems, including shortness of breath, a host of gastrointestinal problems, high blood pressure, migraines, excessive weight gain or loss, and fatigue. When assessing the presence of stress in others, the sisters identified a number of compulsive behaviors, including "nonstop talking," excessive eating, alcohol abuse, overwork, and excessive use of caffeine. On the interpersonal level, stress was revealed through jealousy and lack of trust.

COPING STRATEGIES

The questionnaire also attempted to secure information regarding the use of coping mechanisms to deal with stress arising from various sources. The responses indicated that some individuals' choices of coping mechanisms were somewhat limited. Apparently, these respondents found a few methods of coping that worked (or failed to work) for them and made use of them in almost all situations, regardless of the source of the stress.

The most frequently mentioned coping mechanism

Learning to integrate such opposites as community needs and the need for outside relationships is essential in reducing stress

used by members of the traditional group was prayer, which held only third place among members of the transitional group. Whether a stressor was encountered at the institutional, ministerial, interpersonal, or intrapersonal level, respondents reporting this coping mechanism tended to turn to prayerful reflection to identify and clarify the nature and source of the stress and to attempt to resolve it. Given the frequency with which this response was mentioned, especially by members of the traditional group, prayer was consistently judged to be a highly to moderately effective coping mechanism.

Members of the transitional group cited the use of communication with a friend, superior, spiritual director, or therapist as their preferred way to deal with stress. This response was particularly strong with stressors related to issues pertaining to ministry, and in that context it was perceived as a highly effective coping mechanism. Among members of the traditional group, however, communication appeared to be less useful, especially for those who reported that it was not helpful to discuss stressors related to organizational issues with their superiors.

Additional responses indicated a preference for addressing the stressor directly, especially in the interpersonal area. Members of both groups noted that they attempt to speak to the other party in an effort to resolve an issue or to find areas of mutual understanding. Assertiveness and confrontation were mentioned as helpful approaches in instances of interpersonal stress. On the organizational level, assertiveness appeared to be expressed in terms of

entering into a dialogue to propose creative alternatives that might be less stressful. It also translated into getting involved in the decision-making process, thus positioning oneself to take corrective action regarding a stressor.

Physical exercise was a popular and useful coping mechanism. Although exercise did not address the source of stress, it was generally regarded as helpful in reducing the physical signs and symptoms. It was mentioned most often in coping with intrapersonal, ministerial, and organizational stressors. Frequently mentioned sources of stress reduction were "time off" and a variety of diversions, including such recreational activities as weekend trips, dinners, movies, "escape" reading, shopping, listening to music, or creative hobbies.

A number of withdrawal-type responses were also often chosen as ways to cope with stress. The more positive of these included seeking additional rest, periods of relaxation, or temporary withdrawal during times of high stress. However, members of the transitional groups, as well as certain members of the traditional group, highlighted their preference for avoidance and isolation in ways that they themselves did not necessarily deem helpful, as the stress was left unresolved. Other coping mechanisms rated as "unhelpful" included denial of stress, ruminating about problems without taking action, excessive eating, alcohol abuse, loss of temper control, and excessive work.

Of all the coping mechanisms mentioned, the least helpful was denial, especially when used extensively and for long periods. Without recognition that certain situations are sources of stress and that certain behaviors are manifestations of stress, there is little motivation or opportunity to modify the situation or shore up one's defenses to cope more effectively. It was striking, especially in the face of widespread agreement on various sources of stress, that a number of the questionnaire respondents denied experiencing any type of stress in these areas. Despite their denials, however, they revealed a decidedly passive-aggressive stance that seemed to flavor many of their interactions. Others who demonstrated a tendency toward denial reported engaging in such self-destructive behaviors as excessive eating or substance abuse when a sufficiently high level of denial could not be maintained.

A number of sisters commented that responding to the questionnaire itself was helpful, as it offered them an opportunity to make a realistic assessment of the stress factors operative in their lives and the ways they were coping with them. Participation in stress-management programs would offer additional opportunities to increase each sister's level of awareness

of the sources of stress in her life and her personal response patterns.

STRESS-MANAGEMENT TRAINING HELPFUL

Development of a greater variety of positive coping mechanisms also deserves increased attention. The responses of the sisters suggest that many are expressing stress-related symptoms involving anger, withdrawal, and physical problems. These manifestations of stress take their toll on interpersonal relationships, particularly within the local community, as well as on the physical health of the individual sisters. As noted earlier, the sisters also seemed to employ a very limited repertoire of coping mechanisms, even when they are not especially effective.

It would seem helpful to afford the sisters opportunities for stress-management training in order to develop additional techniques for coping with stress more effectively. For example, a number of the respondents noted a need to learn more self-enhancing ways to deal with feelings of anger. Developing assertiveness and conflict-resolution skills would certainly enhance the sisters' ability to communicate honestly, forthrightly, and confidently while still showing respect for the feelings of others. Such training would also foster each sister's sensitivity toward her own anger without turning it toward herself or taking it out on others.

SELF-ESTEEM AFFECTS RESPONSE

Issues pertaining to self-acceptance and self-esteem also remain sources of stress for many sisters. One component of stress-management training ought to address the irrational ideas that can damage self-esteem. Use of a cognitive or rational-emotive approach can be effective in reducing negative feelings about the self. Research has indicated that a reduction in negative self-talk is even more important than an increase in positive self-talk in repairing damage to self-esteem. Use of such programs as those outlined in David Burns's book *Feeling Good* and Nathaniel Branden's book *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* can be helpful.

Other forms of self-esteem training might deal with body image or involve methods aimed at helping a person to recognize and remove self-imposed limits. Learning how to integrate esteem-building habits into one's daily routine and to revive self-esteem after a failure or setback would also be helpful elements in a stress-management training program. Such training would help increase the energy, confidence, and enthusiasm of the participants, as well as

their valuation and acceptance of themselves and others. Such training would be helpful during initial formation, as the lessons learned could be carried into one's future life and work.

TIME MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT

The questionnaire respondents indicated that time pressures were a major source of stress in their lives. Thus, stress-management training ought to cover time-management skills, teaching methods for reaching high-priority goals while avoiding the pitfalls of procrastination and dissipation of energy. Deep-muscle relaxation techniques, used alone or in conjunction with guided imagery, might also be included in stress-management training. Given the number and diversity of elements that could be addressed within a stress-management program, it would be most useful for each group requesting such training to identify the members' needs and goals so that the program might be tailored accordingly.

PROFESSIONAL HELP SOMETIMES NEEDED

As noted previously, although a number of sisters identified various elements of the depressive syndrome as symptoms of their own stress or that of others, relatively few were inclined to identify themselves as suffering from clinical depression. A similar finding was noted regarding the use of the term "anxiety," although a number of sisters identified feelings of nervousness or tension and cited emotional or erratic behavior. A failure to identify such syndromes may lead to a failure to obtain an appropriate level of professional help. Complaints of sleeplessness, for example, may lead to self-medication with over-the-counter preparations or with alcohol. Depression may be masked by excessive work or hidden behind a wall of silent withdrawal, while debilitating physical symptoms may be a manifestation of anxiety. At times it is advisable to consult with a mental health professional to clarify the sources of one's stress and to design ways to reduce or cope with it more effectively. One sister who did identify herself as suffering from anxiety wrote, "I am grateful that my anxiety

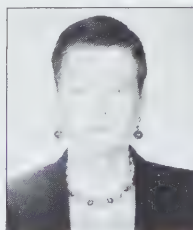
level forced me to seek psychiatric help. This has been the greatest grace and gift which my community has provided me with."

RESILIENCY KEY TO COPING

Change in the structure of religious life needs to be approached realistically, as stress reduction is not an automatic result of such change. Nevertheless, change can have positive effects. A respondent from the transitional groups wrote, "At age 54 I am less stressed, more at ease with losses, and find delight in simple pleasures. I would never want to go back to the old days. Although I have no idea what the future will bring, I trust I will have companions on the journey, as I do now." The resiliency of the human spirit to cope with change, loss, and other life stressors is the intangible element that cannot be quantified. This spirit was summed up by a sister from the traditional group, who concluded, "Despite the stress of present and future changes, I have great hope."

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The Psychopathic Minister

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

Recently, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that in the past three years, six major embezzlements have been discovered by the Catholic church in the United States. One involved a retired pastor, who was sued by his archdiocese to recover more than \$200,000 that he allegedly misappropriated from his former parish for his personal use. Another involved a diocesan director of finance who embezzled over \$1 million of diocesan funds—and then set the diocesan financial records and the chancery offices ablaze in an attempt to cover up the crime.

Another report revealed that a priest being investigated for sexual offenses involving young adolescents was found to have regularly engaged in sexual behaviors with persons of both sexes and of all ages. In addition, records showed that he had several thousand dollars' worth of gambling debts and over fifty unpaid tickets for parking violations, and that he had been arrested for speeding four times in the past two years. Furthermore, when confronted by his bishop, the priest admitted that he had never told the bishop the truth about any of these matters in the seventeen years he had been in the diocese.

In another diocese, a choir director was reported to have conspired with a recently fired liturgist in forging letters of recommendation. It seems that a long-overdue investigation of the liturgist turned up ar-

rests for child molestation, allegations of other sex offenses, the use of several aliases, and misappropriation of parish funds. The attorney for the diocese told the liturgist that he was no longer welcome in the diocese, that he should refrain from seeking any ministry position, and that favorable job recommendations would not be forthcoming. However, this advice was not heeded; the fired employee immediately sought similar ministry positions outside that diocese. He falsified applications by indicating that letters of inquiry about his previous employment should be directed to the parish administrator, but the name and phone number provided was really that of the choir director. The fraud was soon detected. Because the job applications were returned by U.S. mail, both liturgist and choir director were indicted for mail fraud.

THE PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY

Many find it difficult to believe that ministry personnel would ever engage in criminal behavior like fraud, deceit, embezzlement, or sexual offenses—but some do. Often these ministers are diagnosed as having psychopathic personalities. This article describes the features of such personalities and explores how the Christian community is attractive to, and

sometimes even protective of, such ministers. It also outlines some corrective and preventive measures for dealing with these individuals.

The psychopathic personality is similar to the antisocial personality described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)*. It is characterized by a persistent pattern of distorted ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that can lead to disregard for and violations of the rights of others. The disorder is called antisocial because of the individual's proclivity to subtly or flagrantly attack social convention. There are basically three types of psychopaths: (1) the personable, superficially charming individual who "cons" others but usually avoids imprisonment; (2) the belligerent, antagonistic individual who openly flouts social convention and the law and is likely to be imprisoned; and (3) the malignant narcissistic personality (described in my Fall 1995 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT article, "The Narcissistic Minister"). This article focuses only on the first type.

PROFILE OF THE PSYCHOPATHIC MINISTER

Superficial charm, lack of empathy, and an inflated self-appraisal or self-centeredness characterize psychopathic ministers. These individuals view themselves as important persons, and they expect—and directly or indirectly demand—others to treat them as such. They need to be the center of attention, and when they cannot, they become jealous and despondent. While personable psychopaths spend much of their time trying to win the adulation and admiration of others by flattery and efforts to be pleasing, they are often oblivious to the feelings of others because of their limited capacity for empathy.

These individuals have little awareness of the distress they cause others by their deceptive and manipulative behavior. In addition, most are incapable of an intimate love relationship. Marriage for a psychopath is a relationship based merely on the satisfaction of material or sexual needs, not a relationship of love and caring.

Psychopathic ministers seldom allow themselves to experience hurt feelings, because they believe that showing hurt and anger are signs of being weak and of being controlled by someone else. Instead of getting angry, they focus on getting even. Usually, they manifest their vindictiveness in a socially sophisticated manner. And because they don't experience guilt feelings, they can take immense pleasure in strategizing retribution.

Failing to trust others is another core feature of psychopathic individuals. They never learned how to trust their family, so they cannot trust others. Many come from dysfunctional families in which

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one or both parents displayed psychopathic patterns or traits, were addicted to alcohol or drugs, or were emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive. As a result of being unable to trust their parents, psychopaths generalize their distrustful attitude to all others.

Typically, psychopathic ministers are convinced that they must be on guard against others who will attempt to use and manipulate them. Regardless of what others may do for them, the psychopath believes that personal gain is the only basis on which others act. Consequently, they have difficulty understanding the concepts of charity and self-sacrifice. For them, charity always begins at home.

Psychopathic ministers also have underdeveloped consciences. While they are aware of right and wrong and can discuss moral issues intelligently, they do not believe that any moral code is applicable in their lives. Consequently, they feel no guilt when violating such codes. The notion of sin is difficult for them to fathom, since they believe that accomplishing their own purposes has more meaning than sinning. For instance, on his return from national conferences, a liturgical minister brought back expensive souvenirs for selected female choir members. Concerned about the mounting "miscellaneous expenses" on the minister's past two travel reimbursement vouchers, the parish administrator confronted him only to discover that the parish had been billed for the souvenirs. The minister angrily justified the gifts, saying that the parish, which was well off financially, should be more than willing to subsidize his "generous spirit in upholding the morale of the choir." After all, he con-

Sycophantic individuals permit themselves to be controlled, both mentally and emotionally, to the extent that the psychopathic minister functions almost as a cult leader for them

tended, because of his extraordinary artistic skills and excellent reputation, the parish should be eager to reward him in many ways beyond his meager salary.

As already noted, psychopaths are adept at manipulating and exploiting others. One way of controlling others is through deception and deceit. Personable psychopaths usually appear so poised and gracious that their honesty and sincerity are seldom questioned by others, at least initially. They can convincingly bend the truth and lie with consummate skill. They may use aliases or malinger. Lying and prevarication seem to be automatic responses that not only “solve” immediate problems for the psychopath but provide them the immense pleasure of conning the unsuspecting and gullible.

Psychopaths are adept at recognizing and pursuing the trappings of power and prestige associated with high status and the upper-class lifestyle. They may be ingratiating, cooperative, and seemingly unselfish as they move up the ladder of the power structure. When they have achieved their position of privilege, they then focus their time, energy, and attention on accumulating the associated trappings of power. These can include discretionary funds, expensive cars, lavish living accommodations, and sexual favors.

In order to remain in a position of power, they surround themselves with sycophants who protect them from and inform them of threats and challenges to their power. Such servile individuals are easily entranced by a psychopathic minister’s “holiness” and apparent concern for them, as well as the sense of specialness they derive from serving him or her. They permit themselves to be controlled, both

mentally and emotionally, to the extent that the minister functions almost as a cult leader for them.

The essential spiritual issue with psychopathic ministers is their ingrained tendency to focus on power, status, and control in their relationships. Their self-serving thinking goes something like this: because they must be in control of a given situation or relationship, God cannot really be in control; therefore, they must be God. Graciousness, cheerfulness, and charm usually provide them the measure of control and power they seek. When these strategies do not work, psychopaths quickly and easily shift to coercion and mean-spirited behavior to achieve the necessary competitive edge or interpersonal leverage they believe is necessary. Not surprisingly, religion and spirituality are subordinated to their personal need to control.

Faith plays a rather limited role in the daily lives of psychopathic ministers. While some may extol their Christian identity and commitment, they seldom practice what they believe. Other psychopathic ministers may at times experience enthusiasm or commitment but seldom can sustain it. Subsequently, they shift from one spiritual group, movement, or congregation to another in which perceived “opportunities” are greater.

Inevitably, these ministers exploit religion for their own purposes. For them, religion and spiritual pursuits provide venues for acquiring power, money, or interpersonal advantage. Another motivation for practicing their religion or becoming involved in spiritual activities is that others will view them as pious and upright individuals or as generous benefactors. Needless to say, acquiring such a reputation is immensely gratifying for psychopaths. When seemingly pious and personable psychopathic ministers become involved in religious projects, they can manifest remarkable enthusiasm. Frequently, however, this enthusiasm wanes as time passes, and few persevere unless they continually receive adulation and praise for their involvement.

Not surprisingly, there is little depth to the spirituality of these individuals. They tend to relate to God in the same superficial and pragmatic way they relate to others. They are likely to imagine God as powerful, cunning, or ruthless—in other words, matching their perceptions of other father figures in their lives. Often, fear of eternal damnation is their basic motivation for such religious observances as prayer or attending and officiating at services. While this fear may be sufficiently strong to deter them from committing violent acts against others, it does not preclude them from using manipulation and coercion. Prayer tends to be viewed as a means of informing God of their personal needs and wants. When their

prayers are not “answered” to their satisfaction, they are likely to react with anger and resentment, and either stop praying or displace their anger on others.

CLINICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

Formation staff and administrators of religious organizations can take several actions to correct or prevent the turmoil generated by psychopathic ministers. The first is to carefully screen candidates. Just as careful screening is mandatory for those seeking entry into ministry preparation programs, it is also essential for candidates for ministry positions. Although many religious orders and dioceses acknowledge the value of psychological testing of applicants for the religious life, priesthood, and permanent diaconate, relying on the results of a generic psychological battery is foolhardy. Clever individuals with severe personality disorders, particularly narcissistic and psychopathic personalities, can evade the scrutiny of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Witness the number of ministers convicted of pedophilia and embezzlement who were evaluated with that instrument before entering the seminary. Effective screening requires careful, in-depth interviewing by seasoned individuals who follow an interview protocol. This protocol should include a structured review of the candidate's personality structure, family, developmental history, and social history (school, work, and military experience). Since the psychopathic disorder is a lifelong maladaptive pattern, clues of its presence will emerge upon careful investigation. At least five letters of recommendation should be required, and follow-up phone inquiries should be made of at least two of the recommenders. Routine background checks regarding previous schools or seminaries attended or jobs held are prudent if any of the features of the personable form of psychopathy (charm, inflated self-appraisal, or empathic deficits) are noted during the screening process. Presumably, such a protocol will screen out psychopathic and at-risk individuals.

The second preventive action is conducting regular reviews of the performance of every minister or minister in training. Like the six-month performance appraisals utilized in the business sector, these reviews are important to maintaining and increasing quality service in all areas of ministry. While it is commendable that some dioceses have adopted a

variant of this appraisal system for recognized offenders (i.e., weekly or monthly monitoring of ministers who are indicted as sexual predators), some appraisal system or method needs to be implemented to identify at-risk individuals.

Third, psychopathic behavior needs to be addressed when it occurs, for the purposes of containing it, correcting it, and preventing further incidents. The value of a diocese-wide semiannual performance appraisal system is that individual ministers and their supervisors can more conscientiously focus on areas of improvement that become performance standards. The record of behavior regarding these performance standards should be reviewed when annual ministry contracts are up for renewal.

That psychotherapy and psychiatric treatment are mentioned last here reflects the greater potential efficacy of the three previously mentioned actions or strategies. Psychiatric treatment and individual psychotherapy, in particular, have been shown to be at best minimally effective with psychopathic and antisocial personalities. Generally, residential treatment programs and homogeneous group therapy (e.g., a group consisting of ministers with severely narcissistic and/or psychopathic personalities) appear to be somewhat more effective than individual therapy. However, termination of ministry responsibilities is often the only realistic option in contending with psychopathic ministers.

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The Presumption of Priestly Permanence

George Aschenbrenner, S.J.

Perseverance and permanence have never been easy for human beings, nor for cultures and civilizations. They always require a commitment deeper and more courageous than that of passing fancy and temporary excitement. Yet the dependability of persevering commitment is the very bedrock of any civilization. History reveals plenty of evidence that a gradual fraying of bonds of permanency sounds a death knell before the full bursting of such bonds finally buries a culture and civilization. In this article I address an important practice in diocesan priestly preparation related to perseverance.

In many ways, recent years have revealed a fragility, a difficulty, and a lack of trustworthiness in many basic personal commitments. A priest ordained ten or fifteen years becomes bored and is tired of his commitment, and so he begins to think of some other commitment. A young priest falls in love, an experience healthy enough and not unexpected. But in the tidal wave of such emotion, he quickly presumes that he has made a mistake in being ordained and seriously ponders dispensation. These are just two reasons that a rather large number of priests have left their priestly commitment soon after ordination. Something is strange and awry. My concern in this article is with the diocesan priesthood, but the issue is profound and extensive enough to have implica-

tions for any permanent commitment: that of religious life, married life, the life of a dedicated single layperson.

What has happened in such situations? How do we explain such predicaments? Did the priest not really understand what he was promising? Was the seminary preparation not realistic enough for today's world? Many other questions could be and usually are asked—and are often answered with too facile a certainty. A full understanding and explanation is very difficult without careful investigation of specific cases.

I am not attempting any full explanation here—and, even more important, I am not writing in judgment of men in such complicated and stressful situations. My undertaking is much more modest: to describe an intentional exercise, a judgment, a specific practice that I call “presumption for perseverance and permanence.” This concrete exercise occurs in the midst of a whole process of presumption of vocation that delineates and motivates the entire seminary program. It is a process of presumption that runs from seminary entrance until ordination, growing in seriousness and certainty all along the way. After showing the importance of such an exercise as part of the future priest's preparation, I will describe the way this experience also prepares one for

living permanent priestly commitment far beyond ordination, even until death.

PERMANENT COMMITMENT IN OUR CULTURE

No mature person expects permanent commitment to be easy, but for various reasons its very possibility today seems more questionable than before. We have so canonized individual freedom as a supreme human value that responsibility for commitments is too quickly seen as an interference with our freedom. Growth in our appreciation of the developmental phases of human maturity has made us less sure of our ability to commit ourselves to a presence and love far into the future. After all, as we grow through these different stages (if we get through them at all), how different will we have become from who we were earlier in the process? More and more people have become skeptical of their responsibility over the long haul and so are afraid to make promises, to profess their deepest truth, especially in a way that involves a serious commitment of self over many years. From another perspective, contemporary culture has so enthroned autonomy and self-fulfillment that it is hard to talk of commitments that can break through and perdure beyond intensely self-absorbing feelings and projects.

These concerns in contemporary culture are surely being discussed, and in this writer's opinion need much more discussion, especially in terms of a philosophy of life rooted in faith in Jesus. Somewhere in all of this, a profound sense of self has either simply been lost or become so superficially pliable as to seem almost infinitely changeable. Such radical changeability of self affects belief about even the possibility of a permanent profession of self. In some cases it is outright denied, whereas in other cases the denial is subliminal but no less real. However this mistaken conclusion gets imprinted on us, the result is the same—and bodes disaster regarding our future together.

Against the backdrop of such serious issues, this article is not meant to offer a resolution by proving the possibility of permanent commitment. Rather, without being insensitive to these complicated and torturous questions, I am presuming the possibility of such permanence. On the other hand, I cannot but wonder whether the denial of any capability of permanent commitment not only seriously dwarfs the profound dignity of human beings but also foolishly suppresses the sense of steadfast heroism so needed today.

ACCEPTANCE INTO SEMINARY

The acceptance of someone to begin seminary preparation for priestly ordination must always be a

Growth in our appreciation of the developmental phases of human maturity has made us less sure of our ability to commit ourselves to a presence and love far into the future

serious decision based on enough preliminary evidence of a call. This decision must be based on more than whim and arbitrary intuition; it requires hard evidence. Yet the mystery of a vocation from God can never be completely reduced to a case of perfectly clear evidence. Though the mystery of a vocation is born and intimated in the clear evidence of certain requisite attitudes, gifts, and genuine desire, such a vocation finally transcends scientifically verifiable evidence. For this reason, a priestly vocation is never so immediately obvious as to bypass the years of serious preparation necessary to clarify, develop, and mature the call.

The presumption for priestly perseverance and permanence with which this article is concerned has a continuity, beginning with entrance into seminary and growing even until death. The initial presumption that begins seminary preparation is a judgment shared by a number of related parties: candidate, vocation director, bishop, and seminary staff. This beginning presumption that opens the doors of the seminary to the candidate must deepen over time, so that a year or more before diaconate ordination, it can be formalized in a way described later in this article. This presumption, gradually more and more personally assimilated by the candidate, is finally validated by God through the church at ordination. Priestly life and ministry, then, become a careful discernment based on the use of this validated presumption as a rudder that provides direction and balance through the swells and squalls of daily service. Though this article highlights one specific exercise of this continuing presumption,

A fundamental human maturity in self-acceptance and self-actualization is needed if permanent commitment is to have any hope of perseverance

such an exercise must not be dislocated from the context of the whole process.

In using the word *presumption*, I risk being misunderstood. A presumption can seem as arbitrary as a figment of someone's overactive imagination, or as selfish as a strong-willed determination, or as misguided as a projection of someone's unrealistic fancy. For this reason, I cannot stress enough that what I mean by presumption here is a judgment based on the evidence of hard facts honestly observed and interpreted. It is a crystallization of grace, a moment of clarity that formalizes the quality of the candidate's loving relationship with God in Jesus. As a caution against the misunderstandings just mentioned, the presumption must be tested and reflected on through the whole process of priestly preparation.

From the very beginning of seminary, this graced judgment, or presumption, invites a practical act of faith in the candidate's priestly vocation—first on the part of the candidate himself, and then on the part of his spiritual director, his formation advisor, and the whole seminary staff. Serious selectivity of seminary candidates makes this practical faith not only possible but also importantly rooted in the known history of the man's vocation. At this early stage of presumption, the concern is not intensely with permanence in such a vocation. Still, certain important dynamics of discernment are called into play. Practical trust in one's vocation at this early stage means seeing God's hand in everything that endears such a life to the candidate. Anything that disquiets the heart about such a life, however reasonably, is not viewed as an inspiration from God.

Living this initial presumption is really a continuation of the vocational discernment that led the candidate to apply for the seminary in the first place. A candidate's careful living of this early presumption can avoid the confusion of falling prey to the slipshod emotional fluctuation that is always part of daily life. Such early basic vocational discernment will make these ordinary daily experiences instructive and reveal the divine initiative, motivation, and perdurance of a priestly vocation.

A MORE MATURE PRESUMPTION

Years have passed since the presumption of vocation that brought the candidate to the seminary. These years have not been spent completely in the enclosed world of the seminary. Rather, they have involved encounters with many people in leisurely and ministerial situations. Study, prayer, and other sharing with fellow seminarians have bonded the individual's vocation beyond his own experience. His personal relationship with the risen Jesus has also matured through regular prayer and solitude. Competent spiritual direction has helped the seminarian to read the signs of God's loving Spirit in the quiet of prayer and in the daily details and encounters of life, both the boringly ordinary and the excitingly intense. Such one-on-one spiritual direction has become the central structure in contemporary religious formation. It uniquely tailors the whole process of seminary to each candidate and helps him fit into and contribute to the seminary community. In this way the original presumption has been tested and deepened—or the candidate has already departed.

In the last few years of his training, the candidate becomes capable of a more serious and mature exercise of the presumption of his priestly vocation. At this time, much more than at entry into the seminary, the candidate is capable of appreciating the permanence of priestly commitment. The development of awareness, appreciation, and readiness for permanence varies from candidate to candidate. The private exercise of presumption of God's call to the permanence of priestly commitment is the fruit of a personally paced process of discernment. Thus, the timing of this presumption's expression cannot be legislated for everyone, whereas events such as the public profession of faith and declaration of request for orders can be scheduled for groups of candidates. Though the exercise of presumption for permanence does have a strong corporate bonding dimension, it must fit the Holy Spirit's unique timetable for each individual.

The need for appropriate timing will become clear as we further specify the content of this exercise of

presumption. Once again, beyond any sentimentalized wish or boyhood dream of priesthood, the content of this presumption is clear and definite. It is the presumption that God is calling a man to diocesan priestly commitment and ministry for the rest of his life; that God is calling a man to diocesan priestly identity until he dies. The candidate now views clearly the permanence of the commitment. As I will discuss, making such a presumption with genuine intentionality is instructive in some very important ways.

Such a presumption can only be intended after a certain maturation of the candidate's human and spiritual experience. A fundamental human maturity in self-acceptance and self-actualization is needed if permanent commitment is to have any hope of perseverance. Even more important, we are finally seduced to "forever"—it cannot simply be willed—by our experience of God's ever-faithful love in Jesus. It is an overwhelming experience, not just in some peak moment but in keeping alive daily the expectation never to exercise selfish control of one's own life, with intimate trust to leave the control to the guidance of God's loving Spirit. The permanence and perseverance I speak of here can be motivated and rooted only in a radically religious experience.

To consider this further presumption before he was ready would confront the candidate with the frightening, even overwhelming prospect of such perpetuity. In this view, permanence is usually perceived quantitatively (How many long years must I be faithful?). A sign of one's readiness for such presumption is the developing realization that though a quantity of years is involved, what is more importantly at issue is the quality and depth of one's self-realization and faith experience of God's love. Without such a developed awareness and capacity, an intentional presumption of permanence and perpetuity will not fit the candidate's experience. He just is not ready. The quality of his human and spiritual experience does not have the suppleness and tensile strength needed to hold firm under the weighty gravity of perpetuity.

Though this presumption of permanence cannot be made too early, backing it up too close to diaconate ordination also destroys the effectiveness of such an exercise. Ideally, the presumption spoken of here should be made at least a year or two before that event. This is true for a very important reason: Such an intentional acceptance of God's presumption of permanent priestly vocation facilitates a final period of discerning that not only clarifies further God's call in the heart of the candidate but also gives important lived experience of this divine presumption—experience that then becomes the priest's daily life from ordination until death. The mistake of attempting this

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presumption too early or too late is surpassed in seriousness only by failing to exercise such an intentional presumption at all before ordination. Lacking an intentional presumption of priestly permanence, the candidate does not learn the important process of living discerningly in the light of a God-given identity and mission—a process meant to become the very inner structure of his life after ordination. The priest will feel this loss over time. Worst of all, the people to be served always suffer most from a lack of decisive and enthusiastic living of permanent priestly commitment.

To make this presumption in the middle of theological studies is not to engage in some artificial practice at living like a priest. Were it to seem so unreal, this would be a sure sign that the candidate was not ready. The issue here is serious, and the stakes are high. The clear approval of the candidate in the external forum by the seminary rector and formation staff is presumed as part of the process leading up to this special internal exercise of presumption. It is a serious moment of crystallized awareness in the candidate's relationship with Jesus the High Priest. This is no play-acting ruse. With the help of his spiritual director, the candidate recognizes not only his heart's readiness but, even more, its desire for such a special exercise of his relationship with God. He does not feel perfectly in control now of his priestly vocation. Rather, the quality of his experiential love relationship with the risen Jesus is such that the candidate desires to rely

An ongoing onslaught of inner experiences against priestly commitment prevents the basic joy and contentment needed for lifelong priestly service

on that love, whatever fear may be quaking in his heart at the prospect of such fidelity.

The actual performance of this presumptive act with God will be a private matter between the candidate and Jesus. It should be planned and staged so as to express its importance and significance in an intimately personal way. Whether it be done after the great central act of communion at Eucharist or in the candlelit quiet prayer of his own room, it is a moment to be liturgized and journalized with great care. It is a day that stands out from the ordinary, a special stop along the journey to priesthood, an experience often to be revisited and meant to provide guidance long into the future. The candidate's heart has settled on a rudder for balance, a compass for direction, that has never before been so intentionally acknowledged. The precise point of this presumption is permanence and perseverance for joyful service in diocesan priestly commitment.

FINAL STAGE OF PREPARATORY DISCERNMENT

This exercise of presumption of priestly permanence, made in the middle of theological studies, sets the focus for an important final stage of discernment of priestly vocation. Discernment is the interpretation of our interior life, especially its spontaneous dimension, according to an acknowledged profound identity in Jesus. Before the acknowledgment of any profound Christian identity, however, trustworthy discernment in sorting, sifting, and interpreting interior experiences is not possible. Growth into more refined discernment is a gradual process as we clar-

ify and deepen our identity in Christ. The candidate's life now, especially until ordination, is a matter of prayerfully sorting out daily experience in presumption of permanent priestly identity and ministry.

This presumption of priestly permanence until death has implications that the candidate must be courageous enough to recognize and live. The rudder of such presumptive priestly identity provides a guidance of interpretation that gives clear direction to life. But, even more important, this daily interpretation deepens priestly intimacy with Jesus and ensures faithful presence and service in the midst of the people. This presumptive stand for priestly fidelity will reveal the consoling synchronicity of some inner experiences as the continuing call of God and, when followed, will deepen priestly identity. The same presumptive stand will reveal the desolate dissonance of other inner experiences as the disquieting influence of an unholy spirit deceptively leading one away from God's priestly call. When these latter experiences are honestly interpreted and courageously resisted, the candidate's priestly identity once again deepens.

Presumably, the major part of the candidate's busy daily life will reveal the consoling consistency of his inner life with his priestly vocation. His desire for and satisfaction with such a life and ministry will expand and bless his heart. But vocational temptation cannot be absolutely avoided. It is an important part of the development of any person's vocation in Christ. Somehow this is rooted in the divided nature of human consciousness and of all reality. The candidate will at times find his feelings tugging against, maybe even straining against, his priestly presumption. In this way his priestly vocation and identity are tested and purified. Honest interpretation and courageous resistance will help him believe in God's call beyond what he now feels. Without the rudder or compass of his personalized presumption for priestly permanence, such interpretation is much less sure, if possible at all. A man can easily fall prey to the swells and shifts of inner mood and emotion and thereby lose his balance. A well-recognized and personally grasped norm can prevent a fundamental feeling of defenselessness. The intentional identification of himself in the presumption for priestly permanence can keep him upright through the buffeting of life's storms.

As mentioned earlier, discerning from such a priestly presumption is very instructive for the candidate in this last stage of preparation before ordination. To have experienced the fittingness of this priestly presumption with his development over the years reveals, in the majority of cases, an even greater clarity and humble confidence about his priestly call. Such a candidate clearly recognizes his readiness

and confidently requests acceptance for ordination. His readiness has been facilitated by spiritual direction, by the whole formation process, and especially by his practice of this final priestly presumption. Much less risk accompanies such a petition for orders. The “feel” of the permanence of priestly commitment is known to and relished by the candidate.

On the other hand, this intentional presumption can also force the issue of lack of basic peace and contentment in the priestly call. An ongoing onslaught of inner experiences against priestly commitment prevents the basic joy and contentment needed for lifelong priestly service; honest interpretation and courageous resistance do not buttress the priestly presumption made. What the candidate may have wanted in some vague but untested way is now revealed not to hold. What I speak of here is not just one crisis or another but a pattern of discontent over the remaining years before ordination. Usually, signs of such discontent will have appeared previously. In such cases, the intentional presumption of priestly permanence has crystallized the individual’s awareness that God is not calling him to diocesan perpetual commitment. Such a person leaves the seminary with a clarity and peace that allow him to follow wherever God leads him. This clarity is a welcome blessing before ordination rather than after.

PRESUMPTION ECCLESIAALLY RATIFIED

Seminary preparation is aimed not simply at the exciting event of ordination but at the lifelong identity and ministry of priesthood. Though priestly ordination, as an event of self-congratulation, can at times assume too selfish an importance (a disturbing sign in itself) and thus distract from the whole identity and ministry of priestly service, the petition for and conferral of orders is obviously a major step in the journey of seminary preparation. As described already, the whole process of presumption of permanent priestly vocation brings the candidate to a humbly confident and informed petition for ordination to priesthood. This petition is sanctioned by the seminary staff, led by its rector and by the approving applause of the local people from whom the candidate has been chosen. The whole process of seminary formation, aided by internal and external forums in their own distinctive ways and dramatized in the lived presumption of diocesan priestly permanence, finally brings the man to approval for ordination.

The rite of priestly ordination is an act of God in and through the church. The candidate’s presumption of priestly vocation and perseverance, which has grown over all the years of seminary, is now vali-

dated and ratified publicly in the church. Obviously, it is an action never done impulsively or without careful consideration of compelling evidence. It is an action rich in revelation: for God, revealed as gloriously transforming love; for the local presbyterate, in its special role of revealing that love; for the new priest himself, now empowered for a special priestly enfleshment of that love; and, finally, for the people, served in invitation to their own unique radiating of God’s glorious love in Jesus. A day deserving full and grand celebration throughout the whole church, it should also imprint itself deeply on the heart of the newly ordained. A whole future life of faithful ministry is powerfully poised in this event.

This ecclesial ratification of the presumption of God’s call to permanent priestly identity and ministry gives assurance and encouraging clarification for the rest of the new priest’s life. This assimilated presumption, though very helpful for the new priest, is not enough by itself to get him through the transition of the first few years. Gatherings of new priests sponsored by the presbyterate, the mentoring help of a senior priest (pastor), and the honest encouragement of parishioners complement the new priest’s personal preparation. But his presumption is now even more public than when done in the seminary and is not just some private devotion between himself and Jesus. As publicly ratified in the church, it has a certitude and clarity that can carry the priest with direction through the rest of his ministry. This presumption, tested and ever more personally assimilated over the years, now stands as a beacon, a rudder, a compass, giving light, balance, and direction for the future. The last few years of training have especially fit this rudder to the “feel” of the new priest’s heart. His gaze has been focused on that beacon, and he has learned to read that compass.

Now his priestly life, with all its rich and exciting variety, will be enlightened in the daily presumption of permanent priestly ordination. The discernment experienced previously in line with his presumption of priestly permanence is an invaluable aid in his daily life. Whatever in his interior life further reveals and deepens his priestly identity is presumed to be of God’s Holy Spirit, whether it involves obvious joy and satisfaction or a painful, difficult challenge. Whatever deceptively interferes with his priestly call, whether a mood of happy feelings or a burdensome view of boredom and failure, is now interpreted as the temptation of an unholy spirit. Following the guidance of God’s Spirit and resisting the deceptive insinuations of the evil spirit become practical and concrete. Insightful courage and trust in God’s promise of faithful priestly call

become the issues at hand. The young priest who falls in love with a woman presumes that this is not a call away from priestly commitment. Rather, the issue is what kind of relationship, if any, he is to welcome with her. The priest bored and losing the glow of his priestly commitment presumes that he is not being called away from priestly ministry but that he must rather investigate means to renew himself and his permanent priestly identity. This presumption of priestly permanence has a paramount priority in the new priest's heart and provides vocational interpretation in every situation. He has learned this over years of growth into intentional identification with that presumption.

The identification of self with presumptive priestly perseverance is not an exercise of superego or some Kantian moral imperative. As mentioned earlier, this presumption is rooted in an ever-developing experience of God's intimate, enlightening love in Jesus. This quality of spiritual experience that rooted and revealed the man's priestly vocation in the first place must continue to grow in the intimacy of prayer and discernment. Otherwise, the ratified priestly presumption of permanence will lose its attraction and suasive force. No superego empowers the priestly presumption. It is the magnetic power and appeal of a love affair with God in the beauty of Jesus the High Priest. This priestly presumption is not to be clung to irrationally and blindly. Rather, it is a matter of clarity and power of vocational commitment, radiating from a love that will stake all in relying on the Beloved's promise to be faithful and to guide us always.

The presumption of priestly permanence described here should play a central role in seminary preparation. If the candidate does learn such a presumption, it will make a difference in his preparation for petition to priestly ordination. It will also aid him in the joys and trials of priestly ministry.

What I am speaking of here is no magic wand with which to wave one's way through life. Nor is it some unbreakable walking stick clung to for dear life. The presumption I have described is meant to become the inner structure of the priestly candidate's heart, a heart increasingly transformed in God's attractive love as revealed in Jesus. This inner drive of love, enlightened and eager to be faithful to God's glorious dream for the whole universe, always focuses for a diocesan priest in a fidelity to a particular local people. This presumed fidelity requires the courage to stand firm in a promise and profession unto death, just as Jesus did, especially on Calvary, where the light and hope of resurrection originally dawned slowly and now shines with a permanent radiance.



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Therapy for Leaders

Quinn R. Connors, O.Carm., Ph.D.,
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The reputations of most leadership positions in the church today are negative. In an article on "Sources of Stress Experienced by Catholic Priests" (*Review of Religious Research*, 1993), Dean R. Hoge and colleagues note that when provincials, major superiors, and bishops gather, conversations often focus on the number of meetings required; people refusing leadership roles; legal problems; the aging of members; declining numbers of vocations; the significant changes taking place in the church, religious life, and society; and the stress caused by excessive work schedules, time pressures, and responsibility for the people they lead. Such problems can lead provincials, bishops, and other church leaders to a life of loneliness and isolation, often marked by depression and other dysfunctional responses. If they do not bail out early, their main focus often becomes a grim determination to "hang in there" until their term expires or retirement comes.

This stressful experience parallels what is also happening to leaders in the corporate world. For example, the enormous pressures that rapid changes in information technology and corporate downsizing bring to bear on leaders as well as followers make being an effective leader a great challenge. Some in the corporate world have responded by working with "executive coaches." As *Fortune* magazine reported in

1993, "A decade ago, that title belonged mostly to people who helped the boss pick a hair style or deliver a speech without notes. No longer. In the stressful 1990s, coaches and outside counselors are assigned to improve an executive's managerial skills and straighten out his personality disorder, not his wardrobe."

Iris Martin, author of *From Couch to Corporation: Becoming a Successful Corporate Therapist*, goes further in suggesting that interior self-discovery is essential to transforming people into effective leaders. "The hidden self within the executive hero contains the seeds for ongoing mastery of the business, family, body, and spirit," she writes. "Becoming acquainted and aligned with this self and its various aspects and talents is the single most essential activity for preparing future executives for leadership in the next century."

Ongoing psychotherapy—perhaps a more traditional name for "executive coaching," or the process of becoming acquainted with or more precisely aware of the self—is another response for major superiors and ordinaries to consider as a way to address the often stressful challenges of ecclesial leadership today. It can help them make more effective decisions and provide growth in their own psychological and spiritual development. Through therapy, church leaders

can explore their unique and personal responses to the pressures of their role in today's church in ways that enable them to fulfill their responsibilities with greater integrity, energy, and freedom.

Systems theory and psychodynamic theory provide a backdrop for looking at leadership in the church. Murray Bowen's family systems theory, extended to church organizations, offers a helpful framework for understanding the role of a leader and the process of effective leadership. Furthermore, psychodynamic theory helps us understand how individuals behave in such systems.

SELF-DEFINITION ESSENTIAL

Ernest H. Friedman, author of *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, notes that a key component of leadership is self-definition. Leaders must know who they are and where they are going. Self-definition requires persons to define their own functioning within whatever system they lead—province, congregation, or diocese. Leaders must define themselves in terms of both their goals and their relationships with the community. Each of these two aspects of self-definition is equally important and is effective only in a dynamic relationship with the other.

First, leaders must determine goals for their communities in conjunction with the community or diocese and the council or leadership team. They must set a direction and develop plans to get there. Then they must clearly define and communicate these goals and plans to their colleagues. Through this process, leaders let the membership know who they are as leaders and where they want to go.

Second, self-definition for leaders includes communicating with their communities. They must remain connected with the people and parts of their province, congregation, or diocese. Ongoing communication, both formal and informal, helps leaders to be clear about their goals and to evaluate whether or not people understand those goals. The challenge is to stay connected while at the same time not losing the sense of self that enables them to be clear and precise about the direction in which they want to lead the community.

In *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Bowen calls this process "differentiation of self." For him, a "'differentiated self' is one who can maintain emotional objectivity while in the midst of an emotional system in turmoil, yet at the same time actively relate to key people in the system." Thus, the goal is to be objective and clear about one's position while at the same time staying connected to the group.

However, this process of self-definition discussed by Bowen, as well as the interior self-awareness

explored by Martin, are also highly influenced by the psychodynamic history of the individual. Psychodynamic theory suggests that we tend to repeat unproductive and ineffective family-of-origin transactions in our professional interactions with others, as Lewis R. Wolberg explains in *The Technique of Psychotherapy*. We each carry a history of conscious and unconscious feelings associated with such experiences. Thus, an important aspect of self-awareness for leaders is the ability to clarify the range of feelings they have in their experience of being leaders and how those feelings affect their behaviors and cognitions. Knowing and experiencing our feelings helps and guides us to better understand ourselves beyond our intellectual perceptions of who we are. Emotional insight is necessary if real personal change is to take place.

The religious community or the church has elected or has been given leaders who each bring to the job a set of personal, familial, and ecclesial dynamics, all of which affect their ability to do the self-definition necessary for effective leadership. It is important for leaders to comprehend the web of interrelationships within their families of origin, their communities, their work environments, and their societal culture. Undergirding each of those systems is a spectrum of feelings and related attitudes, perceptions, values, and behaviors learned by leaders in the process of their own psychological development. Feelings provide the consistent experiential links among our responses to the various people and events in our lives. Being aware of and experiencing our feelings and emotions about any matter not only helps us to better understand the interrelationships among our own systems but also provides a basis on which to make clearer decisions and develop strategies for implementation.

However, becoming aware of feelings is not always an easy undertaking. As Wolberg observes, our inattentiveness to feelings, our feelings based on distorted perceptions of reality, and our blocks to feelings make true awareness difficult. First, inattentiveness often occurs because our society has frequently socialized us (males in particular) to ignore our feelings and emotions, encouraging us not to express or talk about them but rather to deal with them through rational means or behavior. The church itself has directly and indirectly taught that many feelings—namely, anger and sexual feelings—are bad, sinful, and to be avoided. In addition, the stress and anxiety that come with frequent travel, numerous meetings, difficult personnel issues, incidents and allegations of sexual misconduct, and little or no community life make leaders particularly vulnerable to personality difficulties and thus prone to avoid their feelings.

Second, distortions occur because of associations of feelings with misperceptions of reality. For example, associating silence with disapproval can prompt feelings of anger or fear in a leader, when in fact the silence may represent admiration or affirmation in the listener. Finally, blocks occur because the awareness of feelings in the “here and now” can trigger “there and then” feelings from a person’s past. Those feelings are often painful and associated with guilt, shame, and other negative experiences connected to the personality difficulties of the leaders. Common problem areas include need for approval, avoidance of conflict, fear of making decisions, desire to make everybody happy, need for control, and difficulties with authority.

Also, as Mary Dunn points out in her article “The Church’s Shadow Side” (*Tablet*, July 27, 1996), people have feelings about the church and its teachings, its leadership, and its processes—and church leaders are not excluded from having these feelings. Whether they are angry about the treatment of women, the erosion of respect for papal authority, the process for dispensations from priestly celibacy, or the reportedly low percentage of adherents to *Humanae Vitae*—whether they feel lingering resentment and anger over how they were treated by clergy and nuns during their own development—leaders who have feelings about the church also exercise authority in that church. They can benefit, as individuals and as leaders, from help in sorting out their feelings about such ecclesial issues.

VALUE OF THERAPY

Murray Bowen often said that if there was a problem anywhere in his organization, he was playing a part in it. His effort was to stop focusing on others and start focusing on his own functioning. The greatest resource leaders have is themselves. If their sense of self feels embattled or is poorly defined, their effectiveness within the system they lead is seriously compromised. Regular sessions with a therapist can help them remain in touch with their feelings and the feelings operative in their community.

A therapist can provide ongoing support for a provincial, major superior, or bishop. In an often lonely position, these leaders can benefit from regular contact with a counselor who represents no potential role conflict. The therapist can assist the church leader in sorting out the personal and professional issues involved in a decision, in his or her relationship with an individual or institution, or in his or her dynamics and how these relate to every action and decision made. The therapist has the freedom and responsibility to raise questions, challenge

assumptions, and support the leader in an honest and forthright way.

How leaders relate to other members of their council or diocesan leadership team is influenced by their early family experience. A well-established pattern of withdrawal by the leader when under stress can result in strained meetings and less-than-effective interaction and decision making among the members of the leadership team. The leader’s childhood emotional reaction to an aloof father can be triggered unconsciously by council members or diocesan staff who are perceived as cautious or stingy with their ideas or involvement at meetings. Exploring feelings associated with such dynamics as repressed anger, fear, or threat of abandonment can enable the leader to break the pattern of withdrawal and choose new ways of behaving.

From his or her neutral position, a therapist can help point out some of the pathology in a system. The public nature of such problems as the sexual misconduct of clergy, fiscal mismanagement in the church, or the unequal treatment of women can trigger strong feelings and force us to come to grips with the reality of a system that needs continual renewal and reform. Each province, congregation, or diocese has its own dysfunctional aspects that are often difficult to see because we are so familiar with them—and denial is a strong defense mechanism when painful and difficult aspects of human nature confront us. One of the challenges of leadership today is to confront this anxiety more aggressively, to assist in the church’s self-critique, and to develop plans for changing counterproductive behavior so that the church may remain a credible, honest gospel presence in the world. Leaders can address this responsibility by dealing with it in the context of their own immediate areas of responsibility as provincial, congregational, or diocesan leaders.

Provincials, major superiors, and bishops often need help in being more honest about their own feelings. Leaders do want to live up to the expectations of their members for careful listening and good decision making, done with an understanding of the charism of the community or the mission of the diocese, the signs of the times, and the needs of the body of Christ. That is a heavy set of conscious and unconscious expectations that may or may not be met, depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, there can be a subtle, protective, clublike attitude about priesthood and religious life. It surfaces in resistance to, denial of, or unwillingness to challenge the arbitrary firing of pastoral councils by pastors, the development of emotionally dependent and exclusive relationships by religious, and other behaviors that in different arenas would be considered outrageous or

hypocritical. Church leaders must heed and process their own feelings about and reactions to such situations as part of any decision-making process.

Leaders can get caught up in the role of provincial or bishop and not relate humanly or effectively with individuals. An individual in crisis—whether an active alcoholic, a seriously depressed person, a chronically difficult person in community, or a person acting out sexually with adults—can trigger a leader's own fear or anger about such behaviors. However, acting in the leadership role is often a defense against such unwanted feelings and usually further sets off the other person's dynamics. Real communication and helpful decision making get blocked in these circumstances. People in crisis need leaders who not only can make decisions but also can connect with them on a human level. Leaders who honestly acknowledge their feelings (at least to themselves, not necessarily to the person in crisis) are more likely to connect empathetically with the person in crisis and deal more forthrightly with the problematic behavior.

Leaders can utilize therapists as consultants and coaches. Such assistance can be particularly helpful to leaders in doing interventions for substance abuse, allegations of sexual misconduct, or other such crises in the lives of their congregation's members, or simply in working with their provincial council or diocesan leadership. A counselor might not only assist with an intervention but also help a leader choose new behaviors based on the work he or she has done in therapy.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

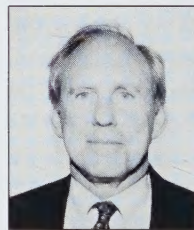
The real challenge for leaders is to be agents of change. They can do that only if they can understand and manage their own emotional responses to themselves and the community they lead. Therapy can help them by offering support, objective feedback, a challenge to strive for greater honesty and integrity,

and consulting and coaching on the whole range of issues and problems confronting church leaders today.

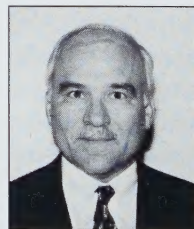
The experience of therapy for church leaders has taught them that leadership does not have to be a burden endured for the sake of the community or the diocese. In fact, leadership can be an opportunity for ongoing personal growth that also helps the community or diocese to change in ways that produce a more effective experience of Christ's presence in the church and world.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Bowen, M. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York, New York: Jason Aronson, 1978.
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